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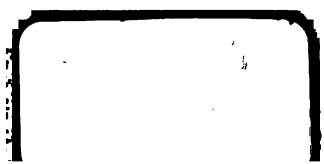
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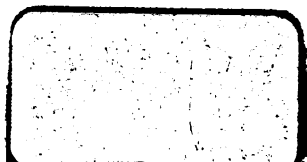


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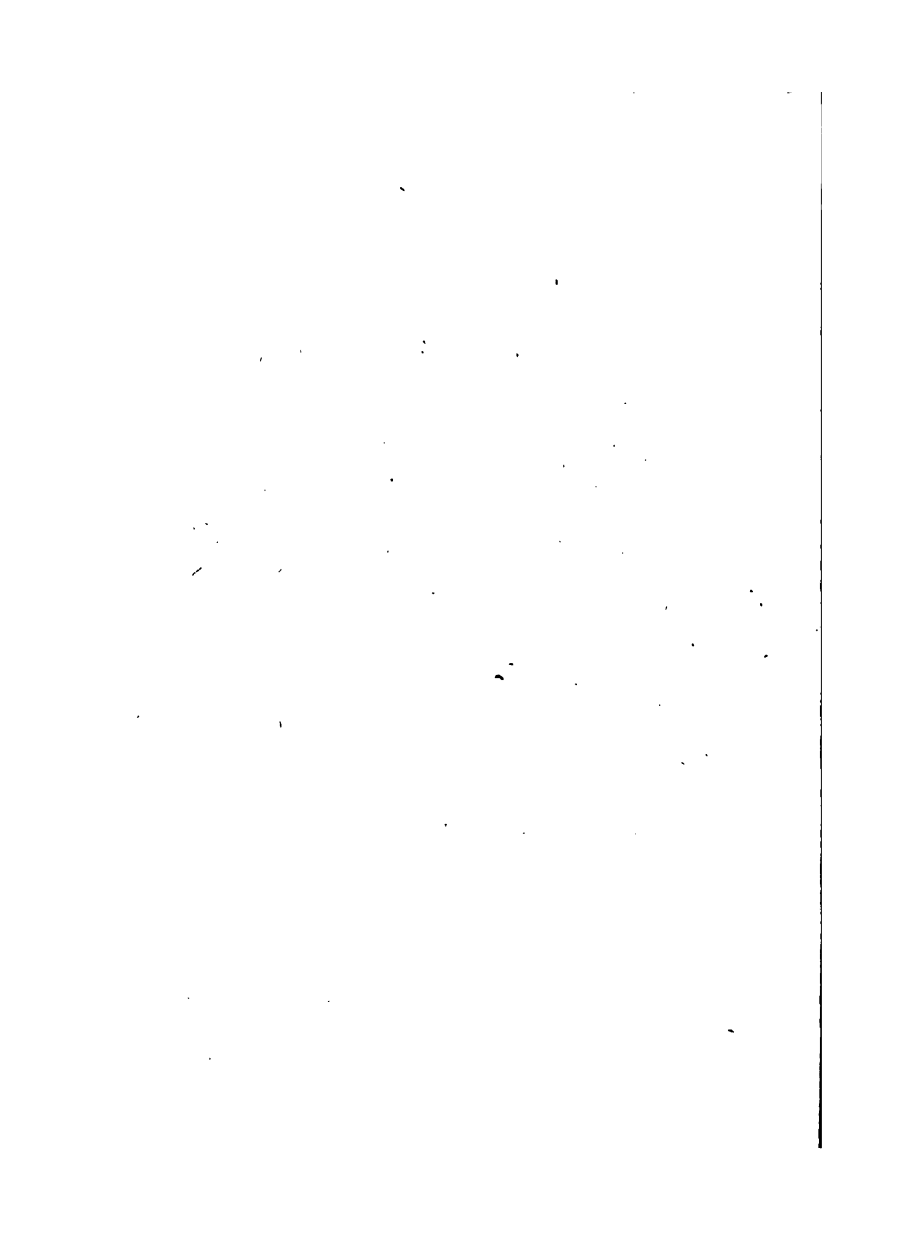
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COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. CCCLXXXIX.

STILL WATERS.

IN ONE VOLUME.



STILL WATERS.

by Marg. Agnes (née) Paull

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1857.

[The Author reserves the right of Translation.]

C. B. e.

"Their strength is to sit still."

Behold! we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last — far off — at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

In Memoriam.

ROYAL
2184
VICTORIA

STILL WATERS.

CHAPTER I.

After them went Displeasure and Pleasaunce,
He looking lompish and full sullein sad,
And hanging down his heavy countenance:
She cheerfull, fresh, and full of ioyance glad,
As if no sorrow she ne felt ne drad.

The Faerie Queene.

A SUBSTANTIAL red brick house, with stone facings, stands on the sunny side of the High-street of Holmdale, a market town in one of the midland counties of England. This was, not many years ago, the abode of Mrs. Lennox, the widow of the colonel of the —th regiment, who died in active service in India. In Holmdale her unmarried life had been passed, and thither she returned as a widow, broken in health and spirits, with her three children, David, Ruth, and Isabel. She settled in the town, partly from motives of economy, partly from an unwillingness to be separated from her boy, who attended King Edward's Grammar School, then in excellent repute, as well for scholarship, as for its high moral tone.

It was a cheerful house. The best rooms had the unfortunate propensity of looking upon the street, but behind there was a sunny walled garden, famous for its fruit trees, and with a luxuriance of old-fashioned flowers bordering the more useful vegetable productions. There were broad gravel walks to pace in winter, and no lack of shady retreats for summer.

Summer was past and gone, however, as Mrs. Lennox remarked with a sigh when the twilight fell before David's return from school. She added an admonition to Isabel not to put out her eyes by reading by firelight; but Isabel, with her arms pil-

lowed on a folio edition of Shakspeare, and her curls falling over the page, still pored over *As You Like It*, and did not hear or heed. Even as she sat, she would have made a study for a painter, and she was in truth picturesque rather than beautiful, with wonderful hazel eyes, rippled brown hair, and a complexion of sun-burnt brilliancy. And in all her movements there was that graceful *abandon* which does not, or ought not to survive very early youth.

In colouring and features the sisters were not unlike, yet those who knew them well could only note the dissimilarity between them. Ruth was the elder by three years, a shy and demure maiden, who had attained that most shy and demure age of "sweet sixteen." Her hair was not permitted to escape in wavy tendrils, but smoothly braided round her face, though nature had her way so far that it was rippled still. Her eyes were less remarkable for size and brilliancy, nor were her cheeks so tanned, perhaps because she was more mindful than the younger sister of precautions against sun and weather. Her dress and air were scrupulously neat, or, as David was wont to declare, most formally precise; nominally the two sisters were dressed alike, but even in small matters character will peep out; and while Isabel's dark merino dress was set off by a dainty bow of cherry-coloured ribbon, which was not always perfectly straight, that of Ruth was only relieved by the linen collar and cuffs, sitting without a crease round her slender throat, and singularly small hands.

"There is David," said Mrs. Lennox, as a scuffle of feet upon the pavement was followed by such a vigorous opening and shutting of the house door as only a boy can perpetrate.

"And Jasper," Ruth added: "I heard his voice, bidding some one good-night."

As she spoke, David threw the drawing-room door back on its hinges, causing an Indian cabinet to totter, and Mrs. Lennox to exclaim that it would fall, as confidently as if she had not asserted the same ever since they settled at Holmdale and the cabinet was placed there. "Well, mother," he said, "I have brought Clinton home to tea."

"I am glad of it," said Mrs. Lennox. "Come in, Jasper. How is your mother?"

The boy, who remained standing dubiously in the background until his friend's invitation was confirmed, came forward and shook hands with Mrs. Lennox. He appeared to be, as indeed he was, at least two years older than David; but this was only one of many differences which had not interfered with their close friendship. Jasper Clinton was tall and strongly made; his expression grave, and almost sullen, and, though his massive brow gave promise of intellect, it was out of keeping with his still boyish features. David, unlike his sisters, was very fair, with light blue eyes, shaded, however, by eyebrows and long lashes of a considerably darker hue than his yellow hair — a peculiarity which always imparts a singular expression of resolution to the countenance; and this imperious cast of beauty was confirmed by the spirited bearing of his slight, athletic figure.

"Isabel will not deign to notice us; — only banished dukes are good enough company for her," said David, seizing his sister's pendent head by the curls, while he looked over her shoulder. Isabel resented the indignity by a slight, impatient gesture, and went on reading.

"Is she reading *As You Like It* for the first time? How I envy her!" said young Clinton, with that *blasé* air which boys are so apt to assume. Yet in this instance an undefined sense of weariness and satiety was probably somewhat genuine.

"For the first time!" repeated David; "for the fiftieth more likely. Isabel began to read Shakspeare before she could spell; indeed, I am not sure that her spelling is even now irreproachable, and, from the fact of its having a monosyllabic title, *As You Like It* was among the earliest of her studies."

Jasper laughed, and so did Ruth; and Isabel raised her head with a pretty assumption of girlish dignity. "How can you talk such nonsense, David?"

"Because a little nonsense was required to rouse my sage sister from her studies. Shut up your folio, and make room for tea, for we are in a hurry. Clinton is to write my theme for me before he goes home."

"You idle boy!" said Mrs. Lennox. "Why not write it yourself?"

"I really cannot, my dear mother. The old Doctor has given us a course of cardinal virtues, beginning with Prudence, and it is against my principles to say anything civil of such a respectable, contemptible virtue. But, as Clinton has no such scruples, he and Ruth may compose some platitudes for which I am to be responsible, and Isabel and I will reserve ourselves for Fortitude. Can you give them a motto, Isabel?"

"'Done like a Frenchman — turn and turn again,'" said Isabel, readily; "that is Prudence, and will serve for Ruth and Jasper's motto. And we can find hundreds for ourselves, and heroes too."

"I cannot conceive," said Jasper, in a tone of pique, "why you call Prudence mine or your sister's virtue, if such is your definition of it."

"I have given no definition; only a motto, and you are welcome to find a better if you can," replied Isabel.

"But why," persisted Jasper, "should you call it *our* virtue? I never had any special predilection for the same."

"Ask David," said Isabel, shaking back her curls with some petulance. "It was he who said so, not I — and, besides, I hate being asked my reasons."

"In which you show a proper sense of inferiority," replied David. "The Doctor said the other day that a woman's instinct is generally right, her arguments invariably wrong."

"How extremely insulting!" exclaimed Isabel. "And it is quite untrue besides, as I shall tell the Doctor when I see him. I should like to bring him and Rosalind together, and see which would have the best of the argument."

"I hope you do not intend to take Rosalind for your model, however. She was not a womanly woman," said Jasper.

"So says Ruth," retorted Isabel. "She was not prudent enough to suit either of you."

"Poor despised Prudence," said Mrs. Lennox, with a smile; "she has hard measure among you, and even Jasper seems unwilling to plead her cause."

"He will not have a chance of doing so unless Ruth gives us tea," said David, and, in compliance with the hint, Ruth folded up her work, with which she had been too much engaged to take any share in the foregoing discussion, and sat down to the tea-table.

"You did not tell me," Mrs. Lennox said to Jasper, "how Mrs. Clinton is."

"As well as usual, thank you," answered the boy, with almost ungracious brevity.

"I suppose that she is very anxious about this Christmas examination?"

"I don't know. I have told her that I have no chance of the scholarship."

"I wonder that you did not scruple to tell such a gratuitous falsehood," remarked David; "however, it will only make your success more triumphant. All the fellows say you will beat Lewis and Allen."

"I know who might beat us all three, if he were to try," said Jasper.

"Ah, so they say! but it is quite nonsense. At all events, I am too young to try this time, and before next year I shall be at Sandhurst."

The words were spoken with the confidence sometimes assumed to bear down opposition, but though Mrs. Lennox looked disturbed, she said nothing.

"Before next year I shall be too old," said Jasper; "if I fail, I am to leave school at once, and look for a clerkship, or something of that sort."

"Perhaps," said Ruth, softly, "you might get into the bank here."

"Perhaps," repeated Jasper; but he did not appear to find anything cheering in such a contingency. He swallowed his tea in haste, and, pushing back his chair, he asked if he might set to work at once. But David was in no such hurry.

"I have not half done," he said. "Give me another cup of tea, Ruth, and then you can light Clinton's candle, and settle him comfortably in the study. I will follow when I am ready."

"I can light my own candle," said Jasper; "upon my word, Lennox, you know how to fag your sisters."

"Not to mention his friends," added Ruth, gaily; "I admire the assurance with which he sends us to do his work, while he sits here at his ease."

"It was Clinton's own suggestion, I would have him to remember," said David; "and mamma likes me to relax my mind, and give her the news before I run away, does she not?" He looked up to meet his mother's smile of proud affection, and drew his chair closer to her own, in preparation for a talk, while Ruth and Jasper Clinton left the room together.

"I never can get on with Jasper," observed Mrs. Lennox.

"No one does," replied David; "but he is more human with us than with any one else, and I like him exceedingly: he is thoroughly gentlemanlike, which is more than can be said for all my schoolfellows."

"I like him too," said Mrs. Lennox; "and I am so sorry for him. He looks as if he never forgot his story."

"He certainly has it in his mind to-night," said David, "for it was cast up against him. He was appealed to in some question of fair and unfair, and then taunted by another fellow, who asked what the son of a felon should know of truth and honour."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Isabel, with kindling eyes. "Did you knock him down, David?"

"No, Isabel; with my theme in my head, I remembered that discretion was the better part of valour, and forbore to attack a fellow twice my size. Clinton has spirit enough in general, but any allusion to his father seems to knock it out of him. He turned white and red, without answering a word, and one can see how it rankles. I must say that the feeling of the school is with him, and there was a cry of 'Shame,' like Isabel's just now, which made Ba—, the fellow I mean, look remarkably small."

"And Mr. Clinton was not exactly a felon, was he, mamma?" said Isabel.

"Something very like it, my dear. He committed a forgery, which is only a genteel kind of felony; and was sentenced to transportation for life. It must be more than twelve years ago,

for I remember that I had you in my arms when I read the trial in the paper. I fancy that it came like a thunderbolt on poor Barbara, for she was so proud and so fond of him, although his manner was by no means prepossessing, — inattentive to her, and elaborately civil to the rest of the world."

"So you have seen him," said David. "I thought you had only known Mrs. Clinton before her marriage."

"I saw little of her afterwards. She happened to be at Portsmouth with her husband when we went abroad, and we did not meet again until I settled here. At first I hoped to renew our former intimacy; but that is impossible, since she can neither endure to speak of the past nor to banish it a moment from her mind. She has never spoken of her husband, and I do not know if he is still living."

"She is an appalling woman," said David, "and as stiff and repulsive to her own son as to any one else, though I believe she likes him after a fashion."

"Possibly," said Mrs. Lennox. "It is an amiable weakness, which mothers cannot easily shake off. But it has been an injudicious training for a boy like Jasper, whose morbidly sensitive temper leads him to exaggerate all the evils of hisposition."

"Jasper thinks so himself," said David. "That is the chief reason why he is so anxious to get the scholarship. Here, he says that dishonour tracks his footsteps, and he should breathe more freely elsewhere. And now I must go and look after my theme."

CHAPTER II.

I have been lonely, — I am lonely still;
I dug all tenderness from out my heart:
There is no fibre of the smiling ill
To grow again, to torture and depart.

IX. Poems by V.

To Ruth the particulars related by Mrs. Lennox were known long since, and not through her mother alone. Even to-night, in the midst of a discussion of the examples applicable to her subject, prudent Ulysses, the Fabian policy, and the lines of

Torres Vedras, Jasper said, reverting to what had passed in the other room, "I don't know where I got this reputation for prudence, but I do know that I shall be sorely tempted to forfeit it if I fail in the examination. I would rather enlist, or go to sea before the mast, than go into the bank here."

"Oh, Jasper!"

"I am in earnest, Ruth; shocking as you may think it. To live on here, to be taunted and pointed at, and mistrusted, at every turn — to remember my dishonour, and to see that it is remembered by others — to have to be grateful for the obligation of placing me in a position I despise, and would willingly spurn; it is altogether intolerable!"

"No one has a right to mistrust you," said Ruth. "The dishonour is not yours, and you will live down suspicion."

"It were easier to die under it, Ruth. There is such a thing as visiting the sins of the fathers on their children."

"Not in the sense you mean," said Ruth, quickly. "You know how the Jews' proverb was set aside, when they said: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' And, after all, Jasper, I believe that you will get the scholarship, and be able to go to Oxford and take orders."

"Believe it if you will, but I am convinced that I shall fail. I have lost ground in the last few weeks; and the more knowledge I cram into my head, the less rises to the surface when I come to use it. For that reason I came here to-night. I cannot help working when I am at home, and it only stupefies me, and does no good."

"The Doctor knows you so well, Jasper, that he will make allowance for what he knows to be only nervousness."

"The Doctor," rejoined Jasper, "has neither the right nor the inclination to make allowances. Nor does the decision rest with him! the examiners always come down from Oxford." He resumed his pen, as if weary of the subject; and Ruth was very willing to let it drop, since her womanly tact enabled her to perceive that any attempt to cheer him only made his anticipations more gloomy. David soon came in to hinder, rather than to

help, by his criticisms and emendations; and though Jasper acquiesced in the alterations he suggested, Ruth was less submissive.

"You will quite spoil that sentence," she said; "let it stand, Jasper, or let David write his own theme."

"No, indeed," said David; "I must strike out Torres Vedras: he may make what he can of Fabius, who was always my aversion, especially since it will serve to heighten the antithesis when I come to Hannibal. But it is a palpable poaching on my preserve to make any allusion to the Great Captain, who is to be the hero of Fortitude."

"Well," said Jasper, looking at his watch, "write it after your fashion, for it is time to go home and prepare my own work."

"Isabel and I mean to walk with you," said David, "for she must needs go star-gazing. Will you join the party, Ruth?"

"If mamma does not mind being left alone," said Ruth; and, when satisfied on that point, she was as well pleased as her sister to join the starlight walk.

Two and two, they stepped briskly through the deserted streets, Isabel and her brother, always together, in front, followed by Ruth and Jasper, who were almost as inseparable. Their voices were hushed, the stillness and silence of the night subduing even David's joyous spirits, so that little was heard save the tramp of their feet along the pavement. It was clear and frosty; the stars shone out with great brilliancy; and Isabel only spoke to point out the constellations as she successively recognised them.

"Isabel is so quick in taking up anything she fancies," observed Ruth; "she only began star-gazing three weeks ago."

Jasper assented, presently adding in an undertone, "My pleasure in the pursuit is spoiled by the necessity of submitting to the arbitrary arrangement of men. When the heavens are mapped out, one loses the sense of their infinity."

"He knoweth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names," said Ruth, softly. "And I think there is great harmony in method."

"Method is *your* cardinal virtue," said Jasper. "I find it only an irksome necessity."

"It is an instinct," said Ruth, "with which some people are born:— those people, David says, who are destined to be old maids."

"Then we may conclude that such is not Isabel's destiny," said Jasper. "Do look, now the lamp-light falls on her, at the way her shawl is wound round her, with one end thrown over her shoulder, and her hands ungloved!"

"You precise and proper person!" exclaimed Isabel, her attention arrested by the sound of her own name: "Do you suppose Cassiopeia cares whether I wear gloves or no?"

"Possibly not," returned Jasper, drily. "If she did, you might pay more respect to her presence, than to that of your humble servant."

"Hear him!" said Isabel, in unrestrained merriment; "he takes it as a personal insult that I don't wear gloves. I wonder what Ruth has done? she keeps her hands rather suspiciously folded under her cloak." But the aspersion was unfounded, as Jasper discovered, when he shook hands with his friends at his own door, and bade them good night. He did not ask them to linger, noting how David hurried the leave-taking, lest they should be invited to go in and see Mrs. Clinton, and his perception of the motive for this haste did not help to clear his clouded brow, nor impart any alacrity to the step with which he entered the room where his mother sat.

David had scarcely used too strong an expression when he called Mrs. Clinton a repulsive woman, although, as the Barbara Maylin of Mrs. Lennox's youthful recollections, she had been remarkable for grace and beauty. Now the regularity of outline had settled into harshness, her manner was cast in the same unpliant mould; even her voice seemed to have but one tone, studiously adapted to convey no expression. She always wore black, which set off her colourless delicacy of complexion, her only remaining beauty; and the grey hair, the hollow eye, and the deep lines round her mouth, gave her the appearance of being much older than she really was.

The aspect of the room was cheerless, small and scantily furnished, and with little regard to the amenities of life. Mrs. Clinton sat at a centre table, on which there was nothing but her work-basket and embroidery frame, and a case containing a miniature, which she hastily closed and laid aside when Jasper's hand was on the door. The boy stooped to kiss his mother's forehead; more, as it seemed, from habit, than as a spontaneous expression of affection, and she observed that he had come home early.

"Yes, I have some work to do," said Jasper, and this appeared to be a sufficient reason for lighting his candle, and sitting down to his books at the other end of the room, before another word had been spoken on either side.

Mrs. Clinton applied herself to the embroidery, which she executed with singular skill and delicacy; and for an hour or more the silence was unbroken, save when Jasper fluttered the leaves of his lexicon, or a half-consumed coal slipped through the bars of the grate upon the hearth. At last he shut up his books with a stretch and a sigh, he looked at his watch, and supposed that it was bed-time.

"I suppose so," said his mother, collecting her materials for work. Then she gathered the dying embers into a blaze, and added: "Come and warm yourself; you must be cold sitting there."

"It is warm enough," said Jasper; but he came nevertheless; and, folding his arms upon the mantelpiece, he leaned his brow against them, looking as fixedly at the fitful blaze as if he could read his fate there. He seemed disposed to linger without making any effort to be sociable; and when Mrs. Clinton attempted to rouse him from his abstraction, it was in a stiff, constrained manner, little likely to be successful.

"Did the Lennoxes walk with you to the door, Jasper? I thought I heard Isabel's laugh."

"Yes, they were all three there."

"Isabel seems to have great spirits."

"Sometimes. She is variable; but then they all spoil her."

"I thought," said Mrs. Clinton, "that David was his mother's favourite, and reigned paramount in the house."

"I believe he does," said Jasper, after a moment's pause; "and that it is only Ruth who is his slave, and Isabel's, and who does all disagreeable duties."

"You need not pity her," said Mrs. Clinton; "she is happy in having work to do, and doing it well."

"I do not pity — I am more likely to envy her," said Jasper, briefly. "Good-night, mother." And he took up his candle and departed.

CHAPTER III.

In vain our pent wills fret,
And would the world subdue,
Limits we did not set
Condition all we do —

Born into life we are, and life must be our mould.

M. ARNOLD.

THREE weeks after this, Ruth and her sister met Jasper in the market-place. They had not seen him since the examination of the candidates for the scholarship began two days before, and now, walking according to custom with his eyes upon the ground, he would have passed them without recognition, if Isabel had not been less scrupulous than her sister in rousing him from his abstraction.

"Well, Jasper, how do you get on?"

"I do not get on at all," said Jasper, with a laugh that rung hollow; and, as he raised his head, Ruth saw the fixed crimson spot glowing on his usually pale cheek. "I do not get on at all, Isabel; I stand still. I broke down altogether in the *viu voce*, and my mathematical paper was almost a blank."

"But they set one thing against another," said Ruth, "and David heard that you did well in classics."

"No success in classics can retrieve my failure to-day," said Jasper. "But it does not signify. I never expected it to be

otherwise, and so there is no disappointment." And he strode on as resolutely as if he were trampling down all the bitter and agitated feelings which belied his words.

"I am very sorry for Jasper," said Isabel, with a sigh; but Ruth neither sighed nor spoke, and their walk home was silent enough.

Dr. Berkeley — "*the Doctor*," as he was called by David and the other boys — was sitting with Mrs. Lennox. Isabel considered him far advanced in years, though he was probably nearer thirty than forty. But the disparity in their ages was no doubt considerable. His dark hair was already silvered with grey, he wore near-sighted spectacles, and he was distinguished by many of the peculiarities early acquired by men of literary and secluded habits; he looked annoyed by the slamming of a door, and an undue proportion of cream and sugar to his tea disturbed his equanimity. And though fond of Isabel, and permitting her to take greater liberties with him than he allowed from any other person, he evidently regarded her joyous spirits, and wild untutored ways, as an exercise of his patience rather than as a subject of admiration.

With a half-uttered exclamation of satisfaction, Isabel recognised the Malacca cane, and the hat with brim of rather dignified breadth, lying on the hall table, and she danced into the room, interrupting without ceremony some remark, addressed in a confidential tone to her mother.

"Oh, Dr. Berkeley! I am so glad to find you here, for it can only be to tell us that Jasper has got the scholarship, and I shall go and put him out of pain at once. We met him just now, looking so very wretched."

"His misery is premature, since the result of the examination is not yet made public," said Dr. Berkely.

"No, but boys always think they know, though I am quite sure they are wrong this time, for Jasper certainly deserves it more than the others."

"I have a high opinion of Clinton," said the Doctor, stiffly; "but you must be aware, Miss Isabel, that moral character cannot be made the only criterion."

“And so you will have nothing to say to poor Jasper, though he is better than any of them, and cleverer too, David says! That is *too* unfair!”

“My dear Isabel!” said Mrs. Lennox, in an admonitory tone, which called the tears to her little daughter’s flashing eyes, and the Doctor instantly took her part.

“I am sure that I quite admire Miss Isabel’s enthusiasm, and, though she spoke hastily, she cannot really believe that the examiners, who are able and honourable men, would make an unfair decision.”

Isabel, however, was not very willing to hear her words explained away, and, hanging her head and pouting her pretty lips, she murmured —

“I don’t see why Oxford dons may not sometimes do wrong as well as other men. Though you have not answered my question, after all.”

Dr. Berkeley repeated his former assertion, that the names were not given out; but Mrs. Lennox said with a smile —

“You may trust to the little woman’s discretion, for she is not quite such a scatterbrain as she seems to be; and she or Ruth are more likely to be able to answer your question than I am.”

“I know I may trust Miss Ruth,” said Dr. Berkeley, doubtfully.

“And not me?” said Isabel, forgetting her ill-humour in eager curiosity; “that is very hard. I can keep a secret from any one, even from David, and I believe that Ruth tells Jasper everything, because she is flattered by his speaking rather more to her than to the rest of the world. Not much, though, and she would never have had courage to ask him about his examination, if I had not been there.”

“If Miss Lennox is in Clinton’s confidence, it is more than I am,” said the Doctor, glancing at Ruth’s deepening colour. “I find it impossible to penetrate his reserve, and for that reason I came here to-day. He has rightly guessed that he failed in the examination and another has been elected to the

scholarship. He must, therefore, relinquish the hope of going to college, and I am anxious to provide for him in some other way. I spoke to Mr. Dunn, who says there might be an opening for him in his office; but I do not like to press him to make the offer, until I know whether it is likely to be accepted."

"A stupid clerkship!" said Isabel; "and to Mr. Dunn, the stupidest of all the Holmdale attorneys! David says that he is fit for better things."

"If David can procure anything better, I shall be delighted," said Dr. Berkeley, drily; "but now I want to know if Miss Ruth can guess what Clinton's decision is likely to be."

Ruth's cheeks were still more deeply dyed, as she replied, after a moment's hesitation —

"I do not exactly know, but I will try to find out."

The Doctor thanked her, and presently took leave, promising to call again in the evening, to ascertain the result of her inquiries.

"And how are you to find out, Ruth, I wonder?" said Mrs. Lennox.

"I suppose by going to Bean-street to ask Jasper," answered Ruth, in a matter-of-fact tone which made her mother smile.

"That is the straightforward way, certainly; but the Doctor intended you to be diplomatic, and not to commit him or any one else. And you will be less likely to learn Jasper's real wishes if you go to Bean-street, and unfold the matter before Mrs. Clinton."

"I know quite well already what he wishes, or, at least, what he does *not* wish," said Ruth; "and his mother may, and ought to help him to decide. So, mamma, if it would do to cut out David's shirts to-morrow, I will go at once, before I take off my things." Mrs. Lennox made no farther objection, and she set off accordingly.

Mrs. Clinton was not at home, and, on opening the door of the little parlour, Ruth found that the room was darkened, and Jasper asked who was there, in a voice betraying severe bodily pain.

"It is I, Jasper. Are you ill?"

"I have a headache," said the boy, raising himself on the sofa. "Why have you come, Ruth? I suppose David sent you to tell me my fate — as if I did not know it already."

"Yes, you have failed: I am very sorry," said Ruth, sitting down beside him, and timidly laying her hand on his. But Jasper turned away, saying, in a stifled voice, as he hid his face in the pillows —

"You need not be sorry, Ruth. I don't wish any one to care what becomes of me, for I shall only be a grief and disappointment. There is my mother — she does not know it yet, and when she comes home she will not say even so much as you do; yet she will feel it more."

"She knows that you have done your best, Jasper."

"Yes; and great comfort there is in that, when the best I can do leaves me still dependent on her exertions. She has worked night and day to meet the school expenses, and this is the result."

This was a new disclosure to Ruth, who had often wondered what became of the embroidery to which Mrs. Clinton applied with such assiduity.

"I could bear it better," Jasper presently resumed, "if — if my mother were like yours. But I know that, while she has devoted herself to me, because she considers it her first duty, she is always longing for the time when she may leave me to support myself. And this I should have been able to do after my first year at Oxford."

"But why should she leave you, Jasper?"

"You cannot guess? *She* has not forgotten the only passionate desire she has felt these many years — to find her way across the world. But for me, she would have been in Australia long ago, and when I first discovered this, I proposed that we should go together. But that, she said, might not be."

"No, I should think not," said Ruth, as she pictured to herself the manifold evils which such a step must have entailed on one of Jasper's morbidly sensitive temper. "And now, Jasper, there is an alternative which I do not so much mind telling you, though I am afraid you will not like it."

She proceeded to relate the object of the Doctor's visit, justified in anticipating that his distaste for such a vocation would be less decided than when the matter had been last discussed between them. For, though he expressed no satisfaction; briefly saying, that if his mother had no objection, he should make none, his mind was evidently relieved by this definite prospect of independence.

Mrs. Clinton came in as they were still talking, and Ruth could fully taste the bitterness of Jasper's voice, when he said —

"Well, mother, Ruth has come to tell me that I am — not a scholar, but a lawyer's clerk elect." As he spoke, a throb of pain sent the blood to his temples, fading again as quickly, and leaving even his lips colourless.

"Lie down, Jasper," said his mother, turning to the window to darken the room still more; "you will be neither scholar nor clerk if you excite yourself while your headache is so severe." There was no expression of sympathy, no caress or soothing word, to soften the bitterness of the admission Jasper had made. This was all she said; it was all her son expected, and only Ruth resented the cold, impassive manner.

In truth Jasper was in no mood to endure condolence, and there was silence for a few moments, broken by Ruth, who said, apologetically —

"I am sorry that I came, but I did not know that Jasper was ill, and —"

"And the Doctor wanted his answer," said Jasper. "Go and tell my mother about it in the other room. My head is too bad to think, and I could rather abide by her decision, and hear no more until it is settled."

Mrs. Clinton took Ruth into the adjoining room, and said, after waiting for some moments, in expectation that she would volunteer the explanation unasked —

"Well, Ruth, Jasper has referred me to you to explain his allusion to the clerkship."

Ruth's answer was given with sufficient distinctness, although in an unsteady voice, and when she finished speaking,

she raised her eyes to Mrs. Clinton's face with a shy, inquiring glance, endeavouring to ascertain the effect of her words. But she might as well have tried to read the expression of an iron mask, and Mrs. Clinton only replied by another question —

"And what does Jasper wish?"

"Will you not ask himself?" Ruth could not forbear replying, though almost alarmed by her own daring.

"No," said Mrs. Clinton; "you can tell me more than I shall learn from him, since with you he is comparatively open."

"I know," said Ruth, "that it was his great wish to go to Oxford; but, since that cannot be, he thinks it best to take the clerkship, and when he has recovered from the first disappointment, I think that he may be happier than he was at school."

"Very possibly — and without attaining great felicity either; but is the disappointment so great? I imagined that, though he worked doggedly, it was on principle, and with little expectation or anxiety for success. However, you probably know more than I!"

Ruth knew not what to reply, embarrassed by the consciousness that Jasper had indeed bestowed on her the confidence withheld from his mother, and Mrs. Clinton resumed, after a moment's pause, —

"If the decision rests with me, you may thank Dr. Berkeley for his good offices, and assure him that they will not be rejected. But I will not force Jasper to take any step of which he may afterwards repent."

"He will be best pleased to have the matter settled for him," said Ruth; and Mrs. Clinton answered with a sort of smile at her assured tone.

"Then you are willing to take the responsibility?"

"No, I did not mean that," said Ruth, quickly.

"Nor did I imply anything so terrible that you need colour, and disclaim it. Jasper could not have a better guide, and to you such happiness is due as he, poor boy, has known."

Sad and thoughtful, Ruth returned home to inform her mother of the success of her mission. Mrs. Clinton's emotions were of a more mingled character. A tremulous smile played

round her mouth, and there was a quivering of the proud dilated nostril, as she drew forth her husband's miniature from its case, and gazed at it long and fixedly, until her glazed eyes were dimmed with unbidden tears. And then she softly murmured —

"At length the day of meeting is at hand, and we shall part no more."

CHAPTER IV.

Still round, and round, and round

Let us compass the ground.

What man is he who feels

Any weight at his heels?

Since our hearts are so light, that, all weigh'd together,

Agree to a grain, and they weigh not a feather.

DAVENANT.

Not only Jasper's vocation in life, but that of David Lennox, was decided in the ensuing Christmas holidays, and neither of the two friends returned to the grammar school. David's determination to follow his father's calling would not yield to his mother's long-cherished hope that he might embrace a more peaceful profession; her unwilling consent was at last obtained, and he was to go to Sandhurst in the first week of January.

Isabel rejoiced with unselfish heroism, stifling her regrets at the approaching separation from her darling brother, in bright anticipations of the laurels he was to win, and of the less distant prospect of seeing him in his Sandhurst uniform. The folio edition of Shakspeare lay undisturbed on the shelf, while all her spare moments were employed in netting him a purse — as great labour of love as the first efforts of a young lady in fancy work are apt to be; and when the task was at last accomplished, her purse was more expensive, less serviceable, and by no means so pretty as those which lay under glass cases on Miss Pinfold's counter.

Ruth's sisterly affection took a more practical turn. She made David's shirts; she hemmed his handkerchiefs; and she

strove to cheer her mother's spirits, which flagged more and more as Christmas drew near. The condolence of their Holmdale acquaintance did not tend to make the separation less grievous. Dr. Berkeley's disapprobation was most openly expressed. He lamented the withdrawal of his favourite scholar, predicting that he would repent, when it was too late, of his boyish fancy for a red coat, which outweighed for the moment the brilliant prospects of distinction afforded by a learned education. Mrs. Dunn, whose boys were notoriously the ringleaders of every breach of school discipline at Holmdale, wondered how Mrs. Lennox could submit to expose her dear boy to the temptations of a public school; and Mr. Ball, the medical man, doubted whether the inherent delicacy of his constitution would endure the hardships of active service or a tropical climate. Mrs. Lennox could make but one answer to all representations:—"David's heart is set on the army, and I have consented." But this could not prevent her brooding over the evils so good-naturedly offered for her consideration; and Ruth was privileged to share all her anxieties and misgivings.

It was an established custom, from the time they settled at Holmdale, that Jasper Clinton and his mother, as well as Dr. Berkeley, should eat their Christmas dinner with the Lennoxes. It was the single exception to the rule of seclusion so rigidly maintained by Mrs. Clinton, and the concession was made, as all knew, for Jasper's sake, who would not have consented on that day to leave his mother alone in her cheerless home.

On this Christmas-day all went as before. The doctor joined the young Lennoxes as they came out of church after the evening service, and hoped that their mother would excuse his going home to dress. Ruth satisfied his scruples with demure politeness, while Isabel and her brother exchanged bright rallying glances, because the former had threatened to give a negative reply, for the sake of ascertaining how the Doctor looked when he was dressed, or if he really possessed an evening coat. But the question remained unsolved, for her courage failed when it came to the point; and, in happy ignorance of the proposed impropriety, Dr. Berkeley turned his steps down the High-street.

"The Clintons got out before us," said David; "but of course *they* will go home to dress. Jasper is so sensible of what is due to rank and station, that I expect him to come forth in a black satin stock, and a coral breast-pin. That is the correct uniform for a lawyer's clerk."

"I see," said Ruth, colouring, "that, on the strength of the epaulettes, which, however, you have not yet won, you are prepared to look down on your old friends, and make merry with their misfortunes."

"Very fair," said the Doctor; and before David could answer for himself, his defence was undertaken by Isabel.

"Indeed, I think it is very *unfair*, Dr. Berkeley. It is *not* our fault that we have lately seen so little of Jasper, for when we are out walking I have seen him cross over the street to avoid us. And as for making merry with his misfortunes, you said yourself that it was very good fortune for Jasper to get into Mr. Dunn's office. I do really believe that you think it a finer thing to be an attorney's clerk than a soldier."

"I should be more likely to distinguish myself in the peaceful profession," replied the Doctor; "but I am afraid that young Clinton is not of my mind. He is very unhappy, is he not, Miss Lennox? When they had their first interview the other day, Mr. Dunn was disappointed by his dry, dispirited manner,—as if he was not going to his work with good heart."

"I am sure that he will work steadily," said Ruth; "but he is still cast down by his failure the other day."

"I agree with Ruth," said David. "I always envied Jasper the power of working doggedly, however little he liked the thing in hand. Small praise to him though, for I don't believe he likes anything, except, perhaps, our sage sister here. I did imagine that he had a sneaking kindness for me, but that is quite over. Only yesterday I wasted five minutes of the beautiful morning in trying to persuade him to come and skate on the Broadmeadows pool; but there he sat, looking blue over the fire, and would not stir. And he skates splendidly, and would quite have cut out the Dyne Court party."

"Oh, David, do you think so?" exclaimed Isabel. "I

never saw anything so neat as the figures cut by that boy — or young man, I suppose he was — in the heather-coloured cap."

"Ah!" said David; "he is a Sandhurst fellow."

"A nephew of Sir John's," added Ruth; "so Clara Gascoigne told me. She was very proud of her tall cousin."

"So the little heiress was there too," said the Doctor.

"Yes, sitting in the barouche, all wrapped in velvet and fur, and looking so delicate and pretty."

"Rather too delicate for beauty," remarked David; "she looks like a wax doll, which might melt or come to pieces, if it were roughly handled."

Dyne Court was the great place of the neighbourhood, and the inhabitants of Holmdale took an untiring interest in the sayings and doings of its owners. Even the Doctor, who was not addicted to gossip, was very willing to hear all which might be told of the only daughter and heiress of Sir John Gascoigne; but the discussion was brought to a close by their arrival at the door of the Red House.

On Christmas night Dr. Berkeley was claimed by the younger members of the party as their exclusive property, and since Mrs. Lennox had been more than usually unwell, and was unable to bear the distraction of many voices, they repaired to the little back room, usually designated as the study, soon after dinner, leaving her only with Mrs. Clinton. Dr. Berkeley was installed in the leather arm-chair which served as a centre for the group gathered round the fire, and the restraint imposed by Mrs. Clinton's presence, even more than by the fear of fatiguing Mrs. Lennox, speedily vanished. Even Jasper looked contented and almost happy, though his brow was again clouded by the first question addressed to him by Dr. Berkeley.

"Well, Clinton, so you have had an interview with your new master?"

"Yes, sir." Jasper, unlike David, did not think fit to drop the school appellation in private life. "He sent for me yesterday."

"And how did you like him?"

"I have often seen him before, sir," said Jasper; and David laughed at the evasive reply.

"And familiarity breeds contempt — that is what Clinton means to imply."

"No, David, not at all," said Jasper, quickly.

"David and Miss Isabel," observed Dr. Berkeley, "think fit to despise all those who do not appreciate their wit and liveliness, for there are no other grounds to look down on Dunn. He is an excellent man of business, and since it is evident that none of his scapegrace sons inherit his habits of application, it is a good opening for Clinton."

"I had not discovered the boundless range of the Doctor's ambition," said David. "Do you *take*, Jasper? He intends you to succeed to the business, and become agent and legal adviser to the heiress of Dyne Court. There is promotion for you!"

"I shall be a rich man before you have succeeded in buying your company," said Jasper, forcing a laugh. As he spoke, a note was brought in, directed to Miss Lennox, in fair, though still childish characters.

"From the little heiress herself," said Ruth, as she broke the seal. "It is the Gascoigne crest."

"Well, Miss Lennox, what does she say?" said Dr. Berkeley; and David bade his sister read the note aloud, to satisfy the Doctor's curiosity.

"It is only an invitation," said Ruth, "and for your last day, David. We cannot possibly go."

"Let us hear what she says," repeated David; and his sister complied with the request.

"MY DEAR MISS LENNOX, — Will you and your brother and sister come to our Christmas party on New Year's night? We are to have a dance and fireworks, and, as the nights are so dark, papa thinks that you had better stay and sleep, and he will send the carriage for you. He wishes me to add, that it

will give us great pleasure to see one or two of your brother's friends also.

"Give my love to Isabel, and believe me ever

"Your affectionate friend,

"CLARA."

"Gentlemen are evidently at a premium," said David; "but they must be able to dance, though Miss Gascoigne is too polite to say so. Do you think that you can get through a quadrille without bringing me to disgrace, Clinton?"

"Not I," said Jasper.

"We could easily teach you the figure," observed Ruth; "but you would not enjoy the evening at Dyne Court without us. We were at the Christmas party last year, and there was not another person from Holmdale, only the county people, and a large party in the house."

"I am sure that we did not miss much in the Holmdale people," said Isabel; "it was a great comfort to have no one to speak to, and I liked to watch the fireworks, without being teased by people coming up to say how beautiful they were. And then Clara was so bright and pleasant."

"Ah, Miss Isabel," said David, "when will you take a leaf out of her book, and learn to say pretty things? I don't believe that Ruth will write half as neat a note in answer, and she is a year older than the little heiress."

"I shall go and ask mamma what I am to say," Ruth answered, as she twisted the perfumed envelope of the note in question round her finger; "and I may tell her that we none of us want to go."

"That *you* do not want to go," said the Doctor. "If the little lady on my right were allowed to speak the thoughts which look wistfully through her eyes, we might hear another story."

"I thought," said Ruth, "that of course Isabel would like to be at home on David's last night."

"So I should, for myself," said Isabel, the passionate tears starting to her eyes, in her eagerness to disclaim such a want of sisterly affection as a contrary inclination might imply. "So I

should for myself, you know, Ruth; but I was thinking that it might be a good thing for David to see something of that Sandhurst cousin."

"That is not a bad idea," said David. "He is a nice-looking fellow, and it would be worth while to learn the ways of the place."

"I will consult mamma," said Ruth; "and I can stay with her, if you and Isabel go. And what would you like to do, Jasper?"

"Oh, he will like to go, of course," said Isabel, as Jasper paused dubiously for a reply; "there will be no moon for our drive to Dyne Court, and I must wear white kid gloves; and that is a conjunction too favourable for star-gazing in conformity with his ideas to be thrown away."

While Dr. Berkeley demanded an explanation of the gibe, Ruth left the room to lay the matter before her mother. The interruption was unwelcome to the two ladies, for the memory of their youthful intimacy only remained to impart additional constraint to their intercourse. Mrs. Lennox agreed with Isabel and David in their sense of the expediency of making acquaintance with the "Sandhurst cousin," and she relinquished the enjoyment of her boy's last evening as readily as if it involved no sacrifice. "It will break the parting to Isabel," she said. Ruth's disinclination to leave her alone was also overruled, so that a note, very differently worded from the original design, was presently on its way to Dyne Court, accepting the invitation for themselves and Jasper Clinton. David declined to avail himself of the permission to bring any other of his school-fellows.

The Lennoxes were the sole exception to the rule which, excluded the Holmdale gentility from the more aristocratic circle of Dyne Court. Sir John Gascoigne drew a marked distinction between them and the other townspeople, and he was not unwilling to foster the acquaintance with his daughter, who had few opportunities of associating with those of her own age. However, their intercourse had not been frequent, and the invitation was an event of sufficient importance to occupy a

good deal of thought and rather absorbing speculation, which served to ward off the less pleasing prospect of David's departure. It was necessary to initiate Jasper into the mysteries of a quadrille; and, though professing a surly indifference to the whole affair, he came with great regularity for instruction, and passively submitted to Isabel's ridicule of his awkward gestures.

"Now *do* look at me, Jasper," Ruth said, with unwearied patience, one evening when Isabel attempted to distract his attention by introducing an entirely irrelevant *pirouette* into the figure. "You must not attend to Isabel."

"It is of no use," said Isabel, flitting past him; "you will never learn the *Chaine des Dames*, from the *Trenise*, if it does not come by nature. Admire David, who knows the graces by intuition — he positively dances like a Frenchman!"

"You foolish child!" said David, bringing his *glissade* to an abrupt conclusion. "I will not dance at all, if you make such absurd remarks, and then you must go partnerless, for no one else will ask you."

"I shall forage for myself," said Isabel. "I mean to make Clara Gascoigne introduce me to the Sandhurst cousin, and I shall ask him to look after you, and see that you write at least once a week."

"If you do" — said David, but before he had determined by what terrific threat to enforce discretion, Ruth reminded him that mamma only waited until they had done talking to play another quadrille for them.

CHAPTER V.

Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

WORDSWORTH.

THE Gascoigne carriage was sent to Holmdale for the young Lennoxes and Jasper in such good time, that they arrived before any of the other guests, and neither Sir John nor such of the party as were staying in the house had made their appearance. They were ushered into an empty drawing-room, but Clara soon appeared to welcome them from the long gallery opening out of it.

"Oh, Miss Lennox! I am so glad you have come first. I made papa send the carriage early on purpose. I must introduce my cousin to you. Evelyn!" A tall stripling, with quick dark eyes, and regular features, answered to the summons. "Here, Evelyn, this is Miss Lennox, Miss Isabel Lennox and Mr. David Lennox, and Mr. Clinton, I suppose," she added, in an aside to Ruth, who had not performed the duty of introducing Jasper with equal distinctness.

"Will you not come near the fire? You must have had a cold drive," said young Gascoigne, following his cousin's lead in endeavouring to make himself agreeable to Isabel, and she exerted herself to reply, though her voice was low and timid.

In her simple muslin frock and sash, her chestnut curls falling on her neck in heavy clusters, Isabel looked like the child she was, but a very pretty child withal, while Clara Gascoigne, although scarcely attaining her height, and still more slightly made, already wore the dress and air of a woman. She was rather over-dressed, in a flounced pink silk, set off by a profusion of ornaments, and her fair glossy hair elaborately braided; yet the animation which brightened the delicate

beauty of feature and complexion, and the grace of all her actions, made it appear as if all she wore became her.

Ruth appeared to less advantage in her evening dress than in the dark merino in which she was much more at home. At an age when the roundness of childhood is lost, and the more perfect symmetry of woman not fully gained, she was, if not positively ungraceful, at least wanting in that perfect grace which was the single point of resemblance between Isabel and Clara. And even in this the contrast was marked, since Isabel's beauty was most apparent in the attitude of stillness and repose, when, as now, she stood leaning against her sister's chair, her clasped hands flung down, her dark eyelashes shading, for the most part, her glowing cheeks, yet now and then uplifted to disclose the light of those marvellous eyes. And in repose Clara was never seen; for, even when her small fairy-like figure was not darting from place to place, her hands were ever in motion, helping out her words with the animated gestures of a Frenchwoman.

Ruth had come unwillingly to Dyne Court; she did not like leaving her mother; she was shy and discomposed at being thrown unprotected among strangers, and involuntary admiration of Clara was allied with disapprobation of a manner by no means in accordance with her rigid views of propriety. For if there is any disposition to be a severe censor, it is never more strongly developed than at sixteen. But it was amusing to see how all foregone conclusions melted before Clara's influence; she hung about Ruth with caressing fondness, first addressing her as Miss Lennox, and then asking whether she might call her Ruth, and when Ruth said, "Why not?" she looked up with a saucy smile, —

"You are so wise and good that I am almost afraid; for I know that you think me quite wicked."

"How can you say so?" said Ruth, sincerely disclaiming the imputation, and thinking her only winning and attractive.

"I am glad that you don't quite give me up, for perhaps you may make me wise too, if you try. Come now," she added, springing up, "I must show you the gallery. I have been work-

ing hard all day to deck it with evergreens, and that naughty boy would go out shooting instead of staying to help me."

She pointed to Evelyn, who replied in his defence, that he had helped her all the morning; and he appealed to Isabel whether he had not earned the right to amuse himself after luncheon, but she was too demure to express an opinion. He then suggested that she should follow her sister to the gallery; and the whole party availed themselves of the proposal to adjourn there. The clusters of glistening holly, rich with scarlet berries, had a very good effect; but Clara accused Ruth of being guarded in her admiration, and instantly demanded the reason.

"I do admire it very much," said Ruth; "I am only sorry that it was not put up for Christmas, instead of for the ball. Now you have no right to call it Christmasing."

"That is so like one of Ruth's refinements," said David, laughing, while Clara clasped her hands in mock despair.

"Ah me! I unwittingly imagined that my day had been usefully, at least harmlessly employed, and now I find that all these branches of holly are wicked and hypocritical, and very demoralising."

"And I," added Evelyn, "must congratulate myself on the good instinct which did not allow me to misuse more than half the day, and led me to spend the other half in pheasant shooting."

Ruth was ever more ready to hear her words misconstrued than to take part in an argument; and though Isabel was less passive, she did not feel inclined to cope with the tall young man, who looked clever and satirical. Jasper, however, who had not spoken since he entered the room, said with some spirit: —

"It is not fair, first to extract an opinion from Ruth, and then to distort her words."

Clara looked up to the speaker, and ascertaining that he was as old and at least as tall as her cousin Evelyn, she considered him not unworthy of attention.

"I am glad," she said, with a bright smile, "that you have the grace to stand up for Ruth, for it was very unchivalrous of

the other two gentlemen to take part against her. And I like excessively to hear her wise sayings, so long as I am not expected to understand them."

"You did not put up all those great branches yourself," said Ruth.

"Not with my own hands. I was only the master mind; and after Evelyn's base desertion, I was forced to be content with hired services. Smith was so tiresome, always telling me that the branches would interfere with the lighting, and that the house would burn like tinder; and now you see that he has left two of the candles in that bracket unlighted; but I shall go and ask papa whether there is any danger."

Sir John Gascoigne had just made his appearance at the opposite end of the gallery, and his little daughter danced down to meet him, and presently returned to report the success of the appeal.

"Papa says I may light those candles if I don't mind the risk of burning the house down, and I don't mind at all; for it would be rather amusing to build a new one. But I cannot do it myself, and I am afraid to ring for Smith, so will you help me? Not you, Evelyn; you are not tall enough to be of any use — but Mr. Clinton."

Evelyn stepped back, looking as if he did not relish the imputation on his height, while Jasper was duly gratified by the distinction awarded to him, and executed Clara's behests with alacrity. It was, perhaps, as well that he was too busily engaged to hear what passed between Ruth and Sir John.

"So that is young Clinton," he said. "Dunn tells me that he has taken him into his office on Dr. Berkeley's recommendation. The poor young man's unhappy position entitles him to compassion; and I shall be glad to afford him every encouragement in my power."

Ruth was not, perhaps, sufficiently grateful for Sir John's offered patronage, and it was Isabel's turn to be next affronted. He took her by the hand, asked if that was Ruth's little sister, and added —

"Ah, qu'elle est jolie!"

"I could have beaten him!" Isabel presently declared in an indignant aside to David.

Sir John was a large man, still energetic in field sports, though indolent in most other things; he was good tempered and rather pompous, proud of his place and family, and passionately fond of his little daughter. He now called Ruth's attention to Clara's graceful attitude, as she stood poised on the lowest rung of the steps which Jasper had mounted to effect the desired alterations; and Ruth, whose eye could take in the whole group, noted the eager solicitude with which he bent down to receive her commands.

The party now began to assemble, for the sound of other arrivals summoned those guests who were staying in the house from their respective rooms.

"They are all aunts and cousins," Clara informed Ruth; "and there is not one of them I care about except Evelyn." Evelyn was, however, still in disgrace. Sir John had ruled that she was to open the ball with Lord Raeburn, a shy, ungainly youth, who did not appear to be sensible of the honour. Evelyn had engaged Isabel for the first dance, and he wished his cousin to promise him the second, but she was not disposed to favour the request. "I have not quite forgiven you yet," she said; "and I am not sure that I shall dance with you at all, — certainly not so early in the evening."

"Will you dance with me, Miss Gascoigne?" said David, colouring, as Clara's eyes strayed towards him and Jasper, who stood together.

"I shall be very happy," she answered, lightly, before she flitted away, leaving Jasper rather provoked that he had wanted courage to make the same request.

"Though, perhaps, it was as well let alone," he observed to Ruth, "as I dance so badly."

"As well as your neighbours, I suspect," said Ruth; "and I think she meant you to ask her."

"Do you?" said Jasper, brightening; "then I shall try to find courage in the course of the evening; though it will be worse than Beauty and the Beast. After which remark, I am

afraid it is no great compliment to ask you to be my partner now."

"I shall like it very much," said Ruth, simply; and they went to join the set which was just forming.

When the music, mingling with the hum of voices, assured Isabel that her remarks could only be heard by the person to whom they were addressed, she ceased to be so much afraid of her tall partner. Although it was alarming to be treated with as much deference as if she were a young lady, it was not at all disagreeable, especially as Sir John had just assumed that she was such a child as not to mind, or not to understand a compliment in French. Evelyn asked what was her favourite book, and the comprehensive answer of "Shakspeare" led to a pleasant discussion of various plays. He was not so well read in them as herself, but he had seen many of them acted: and when he found that Isabel had never been to a theatre, he gave a vivid description of its delights. As she became more at ease, she ventured to speak of David; and, though Evelyn did not at first know who "David" was, he seemed to be sensible of his good fortune in the acquisition of such a schoolfellow, when Isabel pointed him out.

"He is so lithe and active, that he must be good at all games, — just the sort of fellow to get on at school."

"Yes, that he is, — and then he is so clever," said Isabel; but she stopped short, remembering David's warning against any indiscreet confidence respecting him, and presently adding, with some trepidation: "Would you mind telling him about Sandhurst? for then it will not be all strange to him."

"I will have a talk with him as soon as the quadrille is over," said Evelyn, readily; "and then he can claim acquaintance at our barracks. Although I cannot be of much use to him there, for I am near the top of the tree, and expect my commission in six months."

"I hope," said Isabel, "that by the time David is an officer there may be some glorious war, and then he may be chosen to lead a forlorn hope."

"That is a Spartan wish," said Evelyn, laughing, "and it

would be echoed by few of the men who go into the army in these days of peace. They choose the profession in order to lead an idle, pleasant life, living in good society, and seeing a little of the world at the expense of the nation."

"If that were all," said Isabel, with kindling eyes, "David would never be a soldier. He only seeks honour and glory."

"Well," said Evelyn, lightly, "he must start as a reformer, and infuse a fresh spirit into the army."

Isabel was not quite satisfied, but the quadrille came to an end, Ruth joined her, and young Gascoigne went to fulfil his promise of having a talk with David. David pronounced him "a very nice fellow" when he returned to ask his sisters if they could give him any tidings of his partner, now that the waltz was begun. Clara was descried by Ruth, and she and David were soon whirling round. So were Evelyn and Isabel: Jasper could not waltz, and Ruth had not the option of refusing, for no one asked her. She sat rather disconsolately turning over a book of prints in the background, while Jasper remained in the outer ring, impatiently waiting for the conclusion of the waltz, since he had summoned courage to claim Clara's hand for the next quadrille.

To a request, not very gracefully made, Clara very graciously acceded, perhaps because she was gratified by the homage which it evidently cost an effort to pay; perhaps, also, because she was in haste to anticipate Lord Raeburn's movements, who was being reluctantly brought up by his mother on the same errand. Jasper came with great satisfaction to inform Ruth of his success. "I wish," he said, "that you would arrange to be in the same set as ours, for then you can set me right if I make a mistake."

"If I am in any set at all, I will try to be in yours," answered Ruth. But, as she had anticipated, she remained unsought in her retreat, while Isabel was carried off in triumph by one of three school-boys, who were desperately smitten with her beauty. The two unsuccessful rivals sulkily declined to dance at all, and remained sparring in Ruth's neighbourhood, until she thought it advisable to change her position. Securing a

seat which commanded a view of the dancers, she was sufficiently well amused. Clara danced beautifully; Jasper acquitted himself with great credit, and both were talking gaily, the habitual melancholy of Jasper's expression quite lost in the animation of the moment. Ruth was pleased with his pleasure, yet her pleasure was marred by a scarcely acknowledged pang of jealousy, or wounded feeling, that the smiles which she had latterly found it so hard to win should be freely lavished on another.

"Oh, Ruth!" said Isabel, coming up to her sister at the conclusion of the dance, her cheeks still flushed with excitement, "there is to be no more dancing before supper, as we are to get cool in time for the fireworks. And do you know I am almost sorry."

"That saving clause of 'almost' is put in for consistency's sake," said Ruth; "you were afraid that the stupid dancing would take up the whole evening."

"But I never thought that I should have such pleasant partners. I like Clara's cousin very much, and Gerald Courtown is rather a nice boy, though I can't think why he asked me to dance, for he does not know the figure in the least."

If Gerald did not know his way through a quadrille, he was quite competent to guide his partner to the supper-room, and he came to carry her off, leaving Ruth still sitting on the fast-emptying benches. Jasper brushed by her without observing that she looked forlorn; but a word from Clara, who also saw her in passing, sent Evelyn Gascoigne to her side, and they went in together. Ruth, who had not before exchanged words with him, was less sensible of his attractions than Isabel had been. His manner was slightly supercilious, and an undefined impression that he adapted his conversation to what he conceived to be her tastes and opinions, awakened the instinct of opposition. Yet he was certainly agreeable, expressing himself with a terseness and precision very unusual at his age; and when he declared that Isabel and his cousin Clara were the rival beauties of the evening, Ruth's sisterly affection was gratified, even while she felt inclined to be offended.

Isabel cast rather wistful glances towards Ruth, envying her position, since she was in the centre of a riotous group of school-boys, scuffling behind her chair for champagne and cold chicken, and her partner's energetic attempts to enforce order only increased the clamour. Jasper imagined that every one must envy *him*, for he was still by Clara's side, and she talked alternately to him and David Lennox, who sat opposite, wholly neglecting her other neighbour, Lord Raeburn. She was only confirmed in this caprice by an admonition from Evelyn's mother, Mrs. Gascoigne, that it was ill-bred to distinguish the Lennoxes and their friend with such exclusive preference, when there were so many of the county people present.

CHAPTER VI.

Alas! I have nor hope nor health,
 Nor peace within, nor calm around
 Nor that content, surpassing wealth,
 The sage in meditation found,
 And walk'd with inward glory crown'd;
 Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure.
 Others I see whom these surround —
 Smiling they live, and call life pleasure:
 To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.

SHELLEY.

A RUMOUR that the exhibition of fireworks was about to begin caused a general rush from the supper-room, and Isabel was at liberty to rejoin her sister, which she did with an eagerness which provoked Evelyn's observation.

"I saw," he said, "that you were not quite happy in your mind, and at one moment I nearly came to the rescue."

"The boys were rather rude," said Isabel.

"As boys are apt to be."

"Not *all* boys," said Isabel, confidently. David was, of course, the ruling exception, and now she thought that Evelyn might fairly be considered as another, though he was far from having intended to include himself in a class to which he

assumed no longer to belong. He remained to cloak and shawl such of the ladies as were disposed to go into the colonnade, while the boys, and others also who had exchanged their round jackets and falling collars for elaborate ties and evening coats, were already thronging round the knot of dusky figures which was the centre of attraction. Even Jasper had been carried away by the stream, but he returned before Clara had time to be very grievously offended by his defection, to say that he had found a sheltered angle in the colonnade, where Miss Gascoigne would have a much better view than from the drawing-room windows, if she were not afraid of the cold.

Miss Gascoigne was not at all afraid, and Isabel had already given her voice in favour of the colonnade.

"It would be quite horrid," she said, "to go back to a candle-light room." The other young ladies, or at least their prudent mammas, were of a different opinion, and Clara, Ruth, and Isabel were presently ensconced in the place selected by Jasper, only accompanied by himself and Evelyn. Of David they saw no more, though Isabel occasionally caught the clear, joyous tones of his voice, rising above the rest, in persuasive, but fruitless eloquence. Old Jeremy, the gamekeeper, was inexorable in his determination to allow none of the young gentlemen to meddle with his stores, blackening their fingers with gunpowder, spoiling the effect of his Catherine-wheels, or possibly maiming themselves for life.

Few things of men's invention are prettier than good fireworks, and Isabel held her breath in silent admiration, and was rather annoyed by Clara's incessant flow of words. After exhausting all the superlatives which the English language could supply, she had recourse to French, and the exclamation of "*superbe! magnifique!*" were varied by interjections of terror if a rocket chanced to shed its shower of sparks in her neighbourhood.

"We had better go in, if you are afraid," said Ruth, gravely, for she was always intolerant of anything approaching to affectation.

"My dear Ruth!" exclaimed Clara, "you are *too* severe!

You do not understand that I like being frightened. It is a pleasant sensation, like walking on the edge of a precipice, or being in a storm at sea."

"I cannot imagine that any one would be more unhappy in either situation," said Evelyn.

"You are determined to say disagreeable things," said Clara, turning away with a pretty air of displeasure; "you, and Ruth, and Isabel too, by her eloquent silence. I shall not speak to any of you. Mr. Clinton, do you think me silly?"

"Not at all," said Jasper; and the answer was so far sincere, that he thought such graceful folly more engaging than wisdom.

"There again!" exclaimed Clara, as another rocket burst in what she conceived to be dangerous vicinity. "I *know* we shall all be burnt."

"You need not be afraid," said Jasper; "I will keep on the windy side, so as to shelter you from all sparks."

It did not escape Ruth's notice that the protection which Jasper afforded to Clara, without thinking it necessary to extend it to herself and Isabel, was rendered comparatively superfluous, from the fact of her wearing a silk dress, and being, moreover, fully enveloped in a cloth cloak. But she felt that the throb of pain which attended this discovery was unworthy, and she was only annoyed that Evelyn Gascoigne should make the same remark.

"My cousin," he said, sarcastically, "must be infinitely indebted to your gallantry, and I can do no less than imitate it on behalf of the Miss Lennoxes, who run much greater risk in their muslin dresses."

"I cannot imagine," said Isabel, "why you should talk about such an absurd thing as danger when you ought all to be looking at the fireworks. I don't at all want you to come between me and the sparks, thank you, for I cannot see so well."

The exhibition ended all too soon for Isabel's wishes, though others thought that the warm light which streamed invitingly through the long range of gallery windows might be more

agreeable than the chill air of a winter's night. It was necessary, however, to collect the boys before dancing could recommence, and Clara sent Jasper to summon them, promising to await his return. Ruth also lingered with Isabel, who enticed her to walk to the farther end of the colonnade, in hopes of thereby obtaining a view of Orion, which was now hidden from their sight by a projecting block of chimneys.

Jasper faithfully delivered his message, which did not obtain the least attention; and he had almost rejoined Clara in the dark corner where he parted from her, when his progress was arrested by the words, spoken in no measured tone, by Evelyn Gascoigne:—

"You must wait for Mr. Clinton? I suppose you know who this young Clinton is, of whom you make such a hero—a clerk in Dunn's office, and son of the man who was transported for forgery."

"And what then?" said Clara, with a slight, scornful laugh.

What then, indeed? Jasper's heart beat wildly; but his first impulse, to spring forward and deny the charge, died away in the consciousness, that only in the truth of these words their bitterness consisted. He ground his teeth, and clenched his quivering hands, and turned away, to fly he knew not whither, for he could not fly from himself, nor from that withering sense of despair and hopeless dishonour—most terrible to the young, since then the pulses are full of life, and passion has not learnt to yield her sway to reason.

Dark as it was, and hasty and uncertain as was his tread, Ruth recognised his figure when he was passing the lower end of the colonnade; and she stepped off the pavement to the gravel walk to meet him.

"Where are you going, Jasper?—the boys are all at the other end, under the gallery."

Jasper impatiently shook off her hand. "I was not looking for the boys. I do not want them, or any one."

At this moment the clear tones of Clara's voice rang through the frosty air; "Ruth, Isabel, will you not come in? It is too cold to wait any longer for Mr. Clinton."

Ruth bade Isabel go, promising to follow soon, and then she said, timidly, —

"I cannot bear to leave you so, Jasper. Will you not tell me what is the matter, and if I can do anything to help you?"

"Have I asked for help?" said Jasper, fiercely; but as soon as the bitter words had passed his lips he was ashamed of his impatience with one who was uniformly gentle and forbearing, and he resumed, in broken accents, "It is best not to trouble yourself about me, Ruth; it can do me no good, and you only harm. I am a fool; and that is all. To-night, for one happy hour, I fancied that I might be as others, free and careless, and then the fact of my degradation, my blasted name, was forced upon me, and it drove me almost wild."

"But who," said Ruth, "would have spoken such cruel words?"

"They were spoken of me, to Miss Gascoigne," said Jasper, and Ruth knew how much this last circumstance must have aggravated their bitterness. She could give sympathy, even if more definite means of consolation were wanting, saying, with tremulous earnestness, —

"It must seem hard, for there is no pain so dreadful as that of shame."

"And how should you know, Ruth, who have never tasted its bitterness?"

"I must know, in a measure," said Ruth, "because the shame which follows is the great misery of all sin. But there is this difference, that when we do wrong we bring the punishment on ourselves, but *this* is sent."

"And does that make it more easy to bear?"

"It ought to do so," said Ruth, steadfastly, "since we have the promise that no trouble is greater than we are able to endure."

There was silence for a few moments, broken by the sound of music, and Jasper looked up, and could see the gay figures flit past the windows.

"You had better go in, and join them," he said.

"Not without you, Jasper."

"I don't intend to go in at all: I almost think I shall walk home," he answered; but he was not proof against Ruth's entreaties, and they presently entered the gallery together. They went down the country dance with a gravity and decorum which must have been quite edifying to the Gascoigne ancestry, who looked down from the walls in starched severity, since gravity and decorum were not the order of the day. Clara, who was dancing with her cousin, was full of wild gaiety; nor could shyness lay any restraint on Isabel's spirits while David was her partner, and very merry they were.

It did not escape Clara's observation that something was amiss with Jasper, especially since he continued to shun her after the conclusion of the dance, and as soon as she was at liberty she came up to Ruth.

"Can you tell me what is the matter with Mr. Clinton? I have a horrible suspicion that an illiberal sentiment of Evelyn's reached his ears when we were standing in the colonnade. There! I see by your face that I have guessed right; and now what is to be done? Shall I go and tell him that I am not responsible for what Evelyn says? and that I don't care whether he is a double-dyed attorney or the son of twenty forgers? or do you think it would hurt his feelings?"

"I am afraid it would," said Ruth, smiling, yet half-vexed; "but he might be pleased to hear the same thing from me."

"Then tell him by all means; say, that I shall be miserable until I know that he has forgiven me; I should like to dance with him again, only there is no use making any more engagements, since I am engaged three deep, and the people are beginning to go already. Yes, papa, I am coming." And she flitted away, in obedience to Sir John's summons to come and take leave of some of the people in question.

Jasper lost no time in rejoining Ruth.

"I am sure," he said, "from Miss Gascoigne's manner, that she was speaking of me."

"Yes; she fancied that you might have heard what her cousin said, and she was anxious to explain that she did not

agree with him, or think that *that* should make any difference in your position here."

"Did she really say so?" exclaimed Jasper, brightening.

"Yes, really, Jasper. And I believe that you will find the same thing said by others whose opinion is of more importance than Clara's."

"There is no one whose good opinion I should care so much to win. Do you not admire her beauty, Ruth? And there is a spring and joyousness about her, as if sorrow could not touch her."

"I do not know if that is any privilege," said Ruth, thoughtfully, "and not rather a peril. Unlike Isabel, who, with all her spirits, has that strong, passionate nature which cannot go through life without suffering, and that is a great safeguard."

"But she is not spoiled," said Jasper; "and there is something very fascinating in that careless, light-hearted gaiety, all the more so to me because I have never tasted it."

"If people are not light-hearted out of levity," said Ruth.

"And that," replied Jasper, warmly, "I am sure Miss Gascoigne is not. You must allow that it showed real consideration to be so anxious to heal the wound which she had not made. But I think that you are inclined to judge her harshly."

"I did not intend to do so," said Ruth, her heart swelling, because she was conscious of not being wholly guiltless of the charge, since the more Jasper insisted on her praises, the less freely her response would come.

"Only think," continued Jasper, "of the gifts showered upon her, — her beauty, her talents, and her position in the world, and see how her father idolizes her. And yet she is absolutely without pride."

"What I think of most," Ruth answered, "is the loss which outweighs all these blessings, in her never having known her mother. It is enough to account for the little faults which I cannot help seeing. Yet I hope you will not think me harsh, Jasper, for indeed I do like and admire her very much."

Jasper was satisfied with this admission, but Ruth was not. She continued thoughtful and preoccupied; and Evelyn Gas-

coigne, who from a little distance had noted the grave discussion with some amusement, presently approached to inquire what weighty question in philosophy Clinton had failed to solve.

"We were not talking philosophy," said Ruth.

"It was something abstruse, I am sure: people do not generally look so grave in a ball-room."

"I had forgotten that we were in anything but a crowd," said Ruth, naively; "and that, every one says, is as good as a desert. There is hardly any one here whom I know by sight."

"What a courageous avowal, Miss Lennox. I felt ashamed of confessing myself to be in the same forlorn plight."

"I don't know why you should be ashamed of anything so obvious," said Ruth. "I suppose that the neighbourhood is new to you; and I do not know any one, because these are all county people, and we know scarcely any one out of Holmdale."

Evelyn thought this confession still more courageous than the former, but he had already discovered the element of truthfulness in Ruth's character which repelled a compliment, and he held his peace.

The spirited efforts of a few could not prevent the ball from dying a natural death, and as Isabel's heavy eyes betrayed how unused she was to late hours, Clara took her and Ruth to their room at once. When there, Isabel became suddenly wakeful, and she lingered long over the fire, discussing every particular incident, until she arrived at the conclusion, "that it would have been quite a perfect evening but for remembering every now and again that David is to go to-morrow — and I never wished him good night." For David, considering that it would compromise his dignity to kiss his sisters before such an august assembly, had taken care to keep out of the way when the young ladies retired.

CHAPTER VII.

I know a maiden fair to see:
Take care!
She can both false and friendly be:
Beware! beware!
Trust her not,
She is fooling thee!
She gives thee a garland woven fair:
Take care!
It is a fool's cap for thee to wear:
Beware! beware!
Trust her not,
She is fooling thee!

H. W. LONGFELLOW.

DAVID went to Sandhurst, and for three days it seemed that Isabel was in danger of sharing the fate of Henry I., which makes such a deep impression on the minds of all youthful readers of English history, and would never smile again. But on the fourth day she began to amend, and by the end of a week her spirits had nearly attained their usual pitch, which was some degrees higher than that of other people; a happy reaction, to which the necessity of having to resume the school-room routine, on the return of her daily governess from a Christmas holiday, probably conduced. Still she firmly believed that nothing but David's letters, and the prospect of the holidays, could have enabled her to support life with such exemplary resignation.

Jasper took his allotted place at a desk in Mr. Dunn's office; and he likewise thought that only strong resolution could have reconciled him to the endurance of such irksome drudgery. Yet habit and necessity are also elements of patience, and, although it was little consonant to his tastes to copy papers in company with two other young men, whose greater technical knowledge entitled them to assume superiority to one of far higher intellectual powers, he soon learnt to adapt him-

self to his position. His work was done with the regularity of a machine, and in his intercourse with his fellow clerks there was something also of mechanical courtesy, so that he made himself respected without being much liked, either by them or by Mr. Dunn, while he himself concluded that in such a life there was less to suffer if there was also less to enjoy than in his school career.

The two who had not professed so near an interest in these several events were perhaps more powerfully affected by them. Mrs. Lennox missed her boy sorely, and she was not, like Isabel, sustained by a spring of buoyant spirits, so that she found it difficult to shake off the depression and languor of ill-health, from which his presence had never failed to rouse her. She relied on Ruth to spare her all troubles, to share all anxieties, and to cheer her with thoughtful words; and Isabel was a pleasant plaything, but she still lacked the sunshine of David's smile. Ruth, on her part, found that she had lost Jasper almost as completely as David, since they ceased to be school-fellows; such intercourse as they had was by no means so satisfactory, and she felt the change a good deal.

It had been a close and very pleasant friendship; in which, though younger in years, she had taken the lead in giving comfort and counsel, since, as is generally the case, her woman's mind had arrived first at maturity. Ruth was not exacting, Jasper by no means demonstrative; but still she had been happy in the consciousness that she was his first object, how happy she knew not until the charm was broken. He did not frequent the house as formerly, nor join the sisters in their walk. It was not surprising that he did not care to talk of his work, since there is less to say of law papers and title-deeds than of Sophocles and Horace; but neither did he take any interest in those communings on graver matters in which they had formerly been equally occupied. He had but one theme for his private conferences with Ruth — the praises of Clara Gascoigne.

The impression made by Clara's liveliness and beauty on the evening of the Christmas party had not been effaced by his slender opportunities of continuing the acquaintance thus

begun; and he was soon absorbed by a boyish passion as intense in its character as any to which those of riper years may be subject. Of course, if a man or boy is so ill advised as to fall in love at eighteen, his friends and relations must resign themselves to a fair proportion of concomitant folly, although Jasper's habitual reserve saved him from any notorious extravagances. To such as took any interest in his proceeding, — and those composing the society of Holmdale were far from remiss in exercising a purely benevolent supervision of their neighbours' affairs — it seemed very judicious that he should insist so much on the practice of starting for a brisk walk as soon as ever he was released from his desk, and only Ruth knew how little variation there was in his route or in how short a time he contrived to reach the park-gates of Dyne Court by the nearest footpath, to linger there for the chance of seeing the carriage whirl past, even though it might be too dusk to distinguish Clara from her French governess. Or sometimes he turned into those parts of the grounds which were open to the public, since from one point he obtained a view of the house, in which range after range of small, old-fashioned windows began to show the light of fire or candle; and he pleased himself by fancying which of all these rooms was graced by Clara's presence. Returning from his solitary walk in the foggy twilight, his evenings were given to study, either at home or with the Doctor, who, unwilling to relinquish his hold on a favourite pupil, had offered help, of which Jasper gratefully availed himself; and thus his days were fully occupied without any of those spare corners of time which used to be filled up pleasantly enough in the society of David and his sisters.

Ruth was only secure of seeing him on those afternoons when the Dyne Court carriage had been seen in Holmdale. It was seldom there without setting Clara down at the Red House; and if the carriage was at the door when Jasper left the office, he hovered near for the sake of obtaining a passing nod or smile from Clara as she left the house, and then he hurried in to hear the news from Ruth. From none did he desire his day dreams to be more carefully concealed than from the young lady herself;

and it is possible that, if he had been aware that she divined the truth, and was more flattered than offended by such presumption, the knowledge might have gone some way towards dispelling the illusion. Ruth, at least, was only irritated by the air of demure unconsciousness with which Clara ever inquired after "Mr. Clinton," and seemed surprised that she so rarely met him when he called. And Jasper's passion was of a chivalrous and high-wrought character, nourished by solitude and an anxiety to escape from the humiliations of his daily life, which so fretted his impatient spirit, through bright but visionary dreams.

Clara persisted in carrying on one of those odd, one-sided friendships which will sometimes thrive and prosper under every discouragement. To no one was Ruth more unbending, or her disapproval of all which fell short of her high standard of duty more openly expressed, yet still Clara caressed and confided in her, and asked for advice which she did not follow, and admired principles which she could not grasp. In return for such lavish affection, Ruth sometimes seriously applied to the task of confirming these impulses for good; but she soon desisted from an attempt as hopeless as it might prove to weave a rope of sand. Clara's thoughtless levity seemed to render her simply incapable of earnestness of purpose, and love of admiration was her only abiding principle. Yet her sweetness of temper and playful grace were very attractive; and she seldom parted from Ruth without leaving her remorseful for her harsh judgments, especially when the visit was followed by one of Jasper's rhapsodies, since these ever left a sore, impatient place at her heart, to warn her how unfitted she was to give an unbiassed opinion.

"Although," she thought, "I could have borne to lose Jasper, if Clara had been worthy of him." And then she smiled to herself, as she wondered what the world would say to that view of the disparity between Jasper Clinton and the heiress of Dyne Court.

It was with a holiday-feeling, which she was ashamed to own, that Ruth heard Clara's lamentations over the annual

move to London at the end of January. Clara was inconsolable; she was certain that she could not live without her dear Ruth; she hated London, and wished that the Queen were despotic, and that there were no such things as parliaments. Ruth defended limited monarchies, and was inclined to regret that her Majesty could dispense with the attendance of her faithful Commons for nearly half the year. But, at all events, she was free till August; and before Clara returned she might have adopted a new friend, and Jasper might have forgotten his first love. As for Jasper, he had some consolation under his aggravated misfortunes. The six months' separation would not only put his constancy to a sublime test, but add something to their respective ages, which they could very well afford. In the autumn Clara would attain her sixteenth year, and he would not be far from nineteen; and, although he considered that he had made a decisive stride towards manhood in the last few weeks, there were moments when he felt uncomfortably young, particularly when he was trying to shave, or to persuade his hair not to sit like a schoolboy's.

"How you must miss Miss Gascoigne," he said, sauntering into the study at the Red House the day after the grand move from Dyne Court had taken place. In no humour for a brisk walk to-day, he was not ill pleased to find Ruth sitting there alone, engaged in preparing work for the school; and while vigorously tearing strips of calico, it was natural that she should not make a full reply. But Jasper thought that her assent was cold as well as brief.

"What a horrible noise you are making!" he said, discontentedly. "Is it absolutely necessary to carry that on by way of accompaniment?"

"Does it set your teeth on edge?" said Ruth, pausing for an instant. "I know some people hate the sound; but I really am in a hurry, for I promised to take the work to the school this afternoon, and mamma does not like me to be out after dark alone."

"What has become of Isabel?"

"She is in the drawing-room with mamma, nursing a cold, so that I have no one to keep me company."

"You may have me, if you like," said Jasper; "I have nothing better to do."

Ruth coloured with pleasure and embarrassment, doubtful whether to accept the offer; for she was just old enough to be troubled by proprieties, and a great tribulation they were.

"I should like it very much, Jasper, but I am afraid that it would bore you. I may be kept at the school; and then mamma wants me to call on Mrs. Dunn and Miss Perrott, so that there will not be much time for a walk."

"A round of morning visits! — that certainly will not suit my ideas. And now you are going to torment my ears by bringing forth a fresh bale of calico. It is really too much." He made his escape, but put his head in again at the door, to say, "Will you call and see my mother in the course of your walk? She said something about wishing it at breakfast this morning;" and he set off, after all, on the old track to Dyne Court. In the absence of the family he might roam through the place without restriction; and he considered that it might be profitable to feed his melancholy by looking at the deserted house.

Ruth continued her work as diligently, if not with so much spirit as before; and when it was completed, and tidily packed into a basket, she put on her Sunday bonnet, and set forth with her mother's card-case to fulfil the social duties which Mrs. Lennox was always obliged to perform by deputy. Ruth had purposely chosen an afternoon when Isabel could not accompany her, finding that she only increased the difficulty of getting through her visits with credit. For Isabel was apt to sit in an attitude of despairing resignation, her eyes fixed upon the clock, until the ten minutes had expired, beyond which she stipulated that Ruth must not extend her stay; and then she suddenly recovered her animation in an attempt to convey the fact to her sister by sundry telegraphic signals.

"I really cannot help it," she was apt to say, when rebuked such transgressions of decorum; "people are so tiresome —

sending for sweet biscuits as if I were a baby, and asking how I get on with French. And every one in Holmdale is so dull and commonplace, not at all like the people we find in books; nor even pretty and well dressed, like those we met at Dyne Court." It was in vain to bring forward a list of "really nice persons," headed by the Doctor. Isabel only shook back her curls, after her fashion, when unwilling to confess that she had the worst of the argument, and retorted that Ruth must allow that the Doctor was not in the least like *Hamlet* — no, nor even Saladin in the *Talisman*.

CHAPTER VIII.

You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant:
But yet you draw not iron, for my heart
Is true as steel.

● *Midsummer Night's Dream.*

MRS. DUNN was at home, and Ruth replaced the card which she had half-drawn from the case, and followed the maid with the sinking of heart which always seized her when ascending any stair but her own. She was a great hypocrite, for she enjoyed the reputation of being a sweet girl, with such a pretty manner, — much more formed than was generally the case at her age, — and yet she was in truth sufficiently fastidious, and much afflicted with shyness.

Mrs. Dunn was a little fair woman, with a soft voice, and a mind wholly absorbed by the baby for the time being; generally an uninteresting specimen, fat and placid, although sure to atone for its want of animation in early life by starting full fledged into mischief when released from the nursery. The schoolboys, senior and junior, were the bane of the Doctor's existence, and Ruth did not think that the two boys who lay kicking on the door-mat were likely to redeem the character of the family for sense or subordination when the time came for exchanging their gambroon frocks for jackets. Mrs. Dunn and the baby were in peaceable possession of the drawing-room, and

it was necessary that this subject should in the first instance be exhausted. The cap was taken off to show the bald head, the frock thrown back to exhibit the small pink feet; Ruth was desired to observe "its dear little nails," and she was permitted as a great favour to handle the little bale of muslin. She acquitted herself very well, until she rashly ventured from the safe generalities of the neuter pronoun into an attempt to define the gender, and asked if *she* was vaccinated.

"My dear Miss Lennox! You did not know that it was a boy! Surely you must remember his christening on the Sunday after Christmas, with Dr. Berkeley for one of the god-fathers — poor little George Augustus Frederic."

Ruth was relieved when George Augustus Frederic became so discomposed by all the attentions he received that it was necessary to banish him to the nursery, and Mrs. Dunn was able to give her mind with less distraction to the topics of the day. In Holmdale the movements at Dyne Court ~~ever~~ took precedence of other matters, and accordingly the Gascoignes' departure was discussed at some length. Ruth could better endure commiseration for the loss of her friend from Mrs. Dunn than from Jasper, but she was annoyed at having to repel the curiosity which she was too discreet to satisfy. Mrs. Dunn was anxious to ascertain on such good authority whether Miss Gascoigne was not spoiled, and if it was true that Sir John was "rather high."

"I think," said Ruth, colouring, "that Mr. Dunn sees more of Sir John than I do."

"Yes," Mrs. Dunn responded; "but that is only in the office, or on business, which is a different matter; although I must say that nothing can be more handsome than Sir John's manner." She did not care to confess that Mr. Dunn was even more impenetrable than Ruth in his reserve as to all which concerned the affairs of Dyne Court.

The mention of the office determined Ruth to hazard an inquiry respecting Jasper; but she did not gain much satisfaction on this point. "Yes," Mrs. Dunn said, "I believe that Mr. Dunn is pleased with him, at least he has said nothing to

the contrary. He brought him in to dinner one day, and he seemed to be a good sort of young man, only grave and silent, and not near so fond of children as Mr. Dunn's other young men, Bryce and Pearce. Poor Jack, all in fun, fastened the skirts of his coat round his chair, so as to make him look foolish when he got up, and he really seemed quite annoyed."

Ruth could easily understand that Jasper did not much enjoy becoming the subject of Dunn junior's practical jokes; and as she was unable to say anything complaisant, she made no reply.

"Jack says," resumed Mrs. Dunn, "that he was just the same at school, morose and unsociable; but perhaps Jack is scarcely a fair judge, for he has such a noble spirit that he cannot forget poor Clinton's unfortunate story. And then he had the reputation of being one of the Doctor's favourites — he and your brother David, which gained him ill-will. And, by the way, do tell me how your brother is getting on." And Ruth was very glad to do so, instead of angling any longer for the good opinion of Jasper, which she had intended to extract.

The other visit was to Miss Perrott, an elderly lady in straitened circumstances, who lived in apartments over the bookseller's shop. There the range of conversation was even more limited. Miss Perrott took little interest in her neighbours' affairs; but she liked to pour her grievances into a sympathising ear — to enlarge on her landlord's delinquencies in refusing to cure the smoky chimney or renew the faded chintz, or to indulge in reminiscences of bygone days, when she was young and rich and happy. Ruth was so good a listener as to be ever a welcome visitor, and she made her escape with difficulty, walking down the street with an additional shade of gravity on her thoughtful brow, while she pondered how cheerless life becomes when it is occupied only by present cares or fleeting memories.

Possibly the visit which still remained to be paid had as much to do with her gravity as that which was accomplished. It was growing dusk, but Bean-street lay only a few steps out of her way, so that she had no sufficient excuse for delaying to

comply with Mrs. Clinton's desire to see her. And Mrs. Clinton evidently considered that the delay had been long enough, greeting her with the remark that she had come at last.

"It was only this afternoon," Ruth answered, "that Jasper told me you wished to see me."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Clinton, in that prolonged note which expresses dissatisfaction, and she presently explained the cause. "I don't think you see so much of Jasper as formerly."

"Not quite so much. His time is more taken up than it was, and then he used to come about the house with David."

"True, but more out of friendship for you than David, though he liked him very well in his way. Perhaps, however, you are as well pleased to let the friendship drop, now that he is only an attorney's clerk."

Ruth's heart swelled at the injustice of the imputation, and she answered quickly:—

"Jasper, at least, knows us too well to believe that *that* would make any difference."

"I am glad of it," said Mrs. Clinton, smiling a little at her warmth; "selfishly glad. For, if you were to cast him off, Jasper would be nearly friendless, and I should not be justified in leaving him, as I now propose to do. You have done much for him, Ruth, and may still do more; he needs sympathy to give him a motive for exertion, and he will sink into indolence and hopeless depression if he thinks that there is none to note his struggles against an untoward fate. And will you refuse the charge?" For it did not escape her observation that Ruth recoiled a little from the severe earnestness of these words.

Ruth's tears never flowed freely, yet her lip quivered, and her voice was low and tremulous as she replied:—

"I have been friends with Jasper since first I knew him, and it is not likely that I should change."

"You mean that the change is more likely to be on his side. It may be so; but no passing fancy will interfere with your influence in the day of real trouble and perplexity, and even when he stands aloof, you will have much unconscious power, if only you will be patient and bear with him. He will have something

to endure, poor fellow, when my departure is known in the town; there will be a revival of old stories, and many wise conjectures about the present; but they will die away and be forgotten, and then he will stand alone, with nothing to recall the associations of dishonour, of which he is so keenly sensible, — for I shall return no more."

Ruth wondered that the mother's voice should not falter while she spoke of this final separation from her only child; but she understood how a stronger passion had overruled the instincts of maternal love, so that she even now resented the feelings of humiliation with which Jasper bore his dishonoured name, as an undue deference to the world's opinion, and in some sense an injustice to the memory she so fondly cherished.

It was nearly dark when Ruth reached home; and she sat down as usual on the low seat by her mother's sofa, to impart such amusement as might be gathered in pleasant firelight talk, from the precocity of Mrs. Dunn's baby, and from Miss Perrott's standing grievances, reserving her account of the visit to Beanstreet until later in the evening, when Isabel was gone to bed.

"Poor Barbara!" said Mrs. Lennox, much interested in the intelligence; "so she is really going to join her husband, who is not likely to prize her heroic devotion as it deserves. When I saw them together, his admiration of her beauty, which was then very remarkable, seemed to be the only source of his attachment; and of that these years of suffering have made such havoc that scarcely a trace remains. I doubt whether he has a heart to be touched by her unshaken constancy; and since the superficial polish of his manner must have long since been worn away by a sense of degradation, and the character of his associates, he will probably reward the sacrifice with indifference."

"And she does not know that it is a sacrifice," said Ruth. "Jasper told me some time ago that his mother was only waiting to go until she felt justified in leaving him, and that she was eager for that day to come."

"It is strange," said Mrs. Lennox, "but I never understand Barbara. She seems to be more open with you than with any

one else, Ruth. Did she send for you for the sake of telling you of her plans?"

"And to have a talk about Jasper. She hopes that we shall look after him when she is gone," said Ruth, colouring, so that Mrs. Lennox could guess to whom the charge had been especially committed. She looked annoyed, and said, after a moment's pause, —

"Mrs. Clinton can hardly leave Jasper to us more completely than she has hitherto done; but I hope that she does not exaggerate, either to you or herself, the influence which you possess. Indeed, it is not desirable that the same relation which did very well so long as you were boy and girl together, should continue now that you are growing up."

Ruth understood the implied caution, which she would have resented from any but her mother. As it was, she turned her glowing cheek aside, while she answered in a constrained voice, —

"I know; and we see very little of Jasper now."

"So I have observed, dear," said Mrs. Lennox, tenderly; "and I dare say you miss the companionship; but it was wise and right of Jasper to draw back, if he found that there was any danger of your old relations acquiring a different meaning. Of course, with his almost exaggerated sense of his unfortunate position, he must be fully aware —"

"I don't think you quite understand, mamma," said Ruth, interposing, when Mrs. Lennox paused to collect all the reasons she might impute to Jasper for crushing an incipient passion; "you don't understand Jasper if you are thinking that he is at all likely to care for me in *that* way. I should have thought that he was too young to fall in love at all, but he only talks to me of *her*, — I must not tell her name, as I think he would not like it."

"Certainly, it would be a betrayal of confidence," said Mrs. Lennox, more relieved than she cared to own by this information, as well as by the frank simplicity with which it was imparted. "I did not think that he was so susceptible; but he may fall in love, and be as constant as he pleases, though he can scarcely aspire to marry for ten years to come. And so my

little Ruth has shared the fate of other sisters, real or adopted, and is forced to abdicate in favour of a first love. It is very mortifying."

"Rather," said Ruth; "except that now, mamma, you will see no harm in my promise that we would do what we could for Jasper."

"No; you could say no less; and when Barbara is gone, we must try and get him to come about the house as he used to do. You did not tell me when she is to go."

"I believe in about six weeks. They give up the house in Bean-street at Lady-day, and she is to settle Jasper in lodgings before she goes, and sell off the furniture."

"To pay her passage out to Sydney, I suppose," said Mrs. Lennox. "I hardly know how they have lived all this time on the pittance awarded to them by Mr. Clinton's creditors."

"She seems to intend to leave all there is to Jasper," said Ruth. "She said that he had made some engagement which would give her a free passage, and that she had no doubt of finding means of maintaining herself abroad."

Mrs. Lennox listened, and admired the spirit of stern self-sacrifice with a heart softened towards the friend of her early days; but she was again chilled by the cold and passionless manner with which she repelled any allusion to her intentions, when they met a few days afterwards. Yet Ruth thought this reserve less alarming than the comparative openness which Mrs. Clinton had evinced towards herself; and she shrank from any opportunity for its renewal, even while treasuring her words in her inmost heart with a timid hope that she might fulfil the trust committed to her.

CHAPTER IX.

Cleo. Get thee hence. Farewell.

Clown. I wish you all joy o' the worm.

Cleo. Farewell.

Clown. You must think this, look you, that the worm will do his kind.

Cleo. Ay, ay. Farewell.

Clown. Look you, the worm is not to be trusted, but in the keeping of wise people; for, indeed, there is no good in the worm.

Antony and Cleopatra.

As Mrs. Clinton had foreseen, the rumour which spread early in March, that she had given up her house and was about to proceed to Sydney, caused a sensation in Holmdale. Martha, her sole servant, was, if possible, still more austere than her mistress, so that the fact only transpired when Jasper applied to Mr. Dunn for leave to absent himself from the office for a few days, in order to accompany his mother to Plymouth. Mr. Dunn went home and told his wife, and the news quickly circulated. Many of those who had of late relinquished the attempt to keep up any intercourse with Mrs. Clinton, considered it expedient to pay a farewell visit; but the attention was not appreciated, at least by Martha, who opened the door with a defiant air, and returned the invariable answer that her mistress was too much engaged to see visitors. When thus baffled, the more energetic in the pursuit of knowledge bent their steps to the Red House, where there was a chance of obtaining further intelligence. Mrs. Dunn was among the number, so unusually excited by curiosity, that she could scarcely reply to any inquiries after the baby.

"I suppose, Mrs. Lennox, that this news about Mrs. Clinton is no news to you?"

Mrs. Lennox admitted that she had been informed of her intentions some time ago.

"Well, I must say that I am glad it was known to any one; for the mother and son are just alike — so very close. Only imagine young Clinton's having said nothing about it to the other young men!"

"It is hardly surprising," said Mrs. Lennox; "even with us Jasper has been little disposed to speak of what must necessarily be a painful subject."

"Well," rejoined Mrs. Dunn, "it certainly is shocking when one comes to think of it. As I told Mr. Dunn, I hoped that he did not think it my duty to leave the dear children, and go across the world, just for the sake of seeing him working in chains like a galley slave. Indeed, I really could not do it."

"Happily," said Mrs. Lennox, repressing with difficulty an inclination to join in Isabel's infectious laugh at this vision of Mr. Dunn working in chains; "happily, you are not likely to be placed in such a dilemma."

"But, mamma," said Isabel, recovering her gravity, "do you suppose that Mr. Clinton does really work in chains?"

"No, my dear; I believe that precaution is only taken in the case of desperate criminals; and, after so many years' exile, he is probably under merely nominal restraint."

"But do tell me, my dear Mrs. Lennox," said Mrs. Dunn, becoming confidential, and therefore affectionate, "do tell me if you think that Mr. Clinton has used any threat to compel his poor wife to join him. I am sure that she cannot have resolved to go and live among all those dreadful convicts of her own free will."

Before Mrs. Lennox could reply, Dr. Berkeley came in. He looked guilty when he found that Mrs. Dunn was before him, since he was unwilling to be suspected of an inclination to gossip, veiling the weakness even from himself beneath the convenient name of a benevolent interest in the welfare of mankind in general, and of Holmdale in particular. So he suppressed the real object of his visit until Mrs. Dunn took leave, asking after his godson, and discussing the antecedents of the new mathematical master until Mrs. Dunn took leave. Then he demanded whether there was any truth in the report that Mrs. Clinton had given up her house in Bean-street, with an assumption of dignified indifference, which Isabel was so wickedly disposed to rally that she anticipated her mother's reply.

"Are you really going to ask about the Clintons, Dr. Berke-

ley? How we have had all professions here to-day, all asking the same question — soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, gentleman, ploughboy, apothecary, thief."

"My dear Isabel!" said Mrs. Lennox; but the rebuke might as well have been spoken to the winds.

"Yes, mamma, really, I don't count Mrs. Dunn, since she came chiefly to ascertain her duty if Mr. Dunn is ever so unfortunate as to be hung in chains; but first came Captain Dennis, the United Service, as David calls him, because he went into the militia when he left off going to sea. Then I heard the man who came to mend the passage window in close confabulation with Sarah about it. Mr. Taylor stopped us as we came home from our walk; and, for want of a better, he must serve for a gentleman as well as a tailor. When I was helping old Job to prick out the lettuces, he made so bold as to ask if Jasper's mother was going to transport herself; and then Mr. Ball came, so full of the news that he never even asked mamma how she was. So you see that I was only in difficulty for a thief."

"Well," said the Doctor, with a grave simplicity, which was no less diverting, because it was difficult to determine whether it was assumed; "since you have made out so good a case, I suppose that I must be the thief."

"No! — will you really? That is *too* obliging. I must write and tell David; and that reminds me to show you his last letter, — such a long one. But no one now cares for anything in the world except Jasper and Mrs. Clinton."

"Well," said Mrs. Lennox, "I wonder that you do not care a little for Jasper, considering how long we have known him."

"So I do care, mamma," returned Isabel, subdued for an instant; "every time I see Jasper I should like to tell him how sorry I am, only he looks so grave that I do not dare. And you see that, after all, David thinks he may do better without his mother."

"And what David says is of course conclusive," said the Doctor.

It was at least equally a thing of course that Isabel should accept the remark as a defiance.

"Why, I don't know who should be a better judge. But I have changed my mind, and shall not show you David's letter; you are not worthy of it, since you always carp at what he says."

"What has become of Miss Ruth?" said the Doctor, without caring to refute the charge; and Mrs. Lennox observed, with a smile, —

"There, Isabel, he could say nothing more severe; he wishes for peace and rational conversation, and so he thinks of Ruth."

"I am too mighty for him, that is all," replied Isabel, fearlessly. "However, I will call Ruth, who is in the study, and tell her that we are secure from any more visitors now that we have got down to the thief. She took refuge there because every one appealed to her for information about Mrs. Clinton."

"It was rather trying," said Mrs. Lennox; "but now you can go and tell her that there is no one here but the Doctor."

"I am going," said Isabel; "for I see that you want to get rid of me, and I can keep Ruth out of the way by reminding her that procrastination is the *thief* of time. For she wants to finish her bag for Mrs. Clinton."

She pounced upon a volume of the *Faerie Queene*, which had almost supplanted Shakspeare in her affections; and after lingering for a moment to give and claim a caress from her mother, she sprang away, only rewarding the Doctor for his politeness in rising to open the door for her by an arch defying glance.

"I am afraid that she is but a spoiled monkey," said Mrs. Lennox, pleadingly; "yet she is sometimes sedate enough, and I have not the heart to check such a spring of youth and spirits."

"One can hardly believe that there is only three years between the sisters," observed Dr. Berkeley. "I do not recollect that Miss Ruth was ever young enough to — to say those sort of things."

With a half smile, Mrs. Lennox suggested that there might be a difference in disposition as well as in age. "And I cannot," she added, "wish that Isabel should grow old faster than she does, for it is pleasant to have something young about the house. Indeed, I would rather see Ruth's sixteen years sit more easily upon her. When I look back, it seems as if she had

no youth — the earnest tone of her mind still deepening, and thoughtful care for others leaving no space for natural gaiety."

"She has chosen the better part," the Doctor said, musingly, and then he changed the subject. Now that he was safe from Isabel's raillery, he wished to ascertain the truth about the Clintons; and she would have triumphed if she had been there, for his opinion coincided with David's, that Jasper might get on better alone.

Meanwhile Ruth sat in the study, working diligently at her travelling-bag, and Isabel had coiled herself into the window-seat, now reading a few snatches about "faire Una," and now entertaining her sister with an account of the Doctor's complaisance in submitting to his new name. "Ah!" she presently exclaimed, as the twilight deepened, "this is the time when I so miss David. How he used to scamper along the pavement, and shout out good-night to some of the other boys, as he pushed up the latch. And there is some one at the door now."

"It is Jasper," said Ruth; "but he has quite left off opening the door with the orthodox grammar-school kick, and so I suppose will David when he comes back. Just run out, Isabel, and tell him we are here, for I think he would rather not see the Doctor to-night."

Jasper profited by the warning, and took refuge with the sisters. He looked ill and unhappy, with no superfluous words at command; so that it was difficult to say for what he had come, unless it was to sit with folded arms on the high old-fashioned fender. As he only said yes and no at random to the questions addressed to him, the girls resumed their several occupations, and silence reigned for some time, until he roused himself to ask, "Shall you finish the bag to-night, Ruth?"

"Yes; I am putting in the last stitches now: you can take it back with you, if you like."

"Very well. We are to be off to-morrow, as my mother finds she can be ready; and it is better to wait a little while at Plymouth than to run any risk of missing the ship."

"To-morrow," repeated Ruth. "I had no idea that it was to be before Wednesday, and we hoped to see Mrs. Clinton again."

"It would have done no good; she is harassed and worried, and anxious to be gone; and the only thing which delayed her is satisfactorily arranged. I shall not have to look for lodgings, since Martha, who is a woman of capital, has settled to take on the house and me together. I am to keep the two rooms on the ground-floor, and she will look out for another eligible lodger."

"That is a comfortable arrangement," said Ruth. "Martha will keep you in order, and see that you eat your meals at regular hours, and don't sit up too late at night; and she will deprive me of my proposed occupation of sewing on your shirt buttons." She looked up, and sought in vain to win an answering smile. Jasper's brows were drawn together, and she added, gently, "I am afraid your head aches."

"A little," he replied, turning impatiently aside. He took up the cover of a letter which lay on the mantelpiece, and asked with awakened interest by whom it was directed.

Isabel anticipated her sister's reply. "By Clara Gascoigne, of course. It is very well for Ruth that she has no other correspondent; she answers Clara's letters with the greatest exactness, but it is such a labour of love. She is always nibbling her pen, and coming to a full stop; and I believe that she takes longer to fill three sides of a sheet of paper than Clara does to run off her five pages."

"Does Miss Gascoigne write such long letters?"

"Yes, and they are very amusing. She had heard from her cousin that he liked David very much. Have you got her letter, Ruth?"

"Yes, I think so," said Ruth, but she did not produce it. The maid appeared to say, that she had taken in the urn, and Ruth entrusted her sister with the keys, promising to follow as soon as she had finished her bag. Jasper waited until it was completed, and Ruth put it into his hand with a timid hope that it might be useful to his mother. But Jasper heard with inattentive ear, and it presently appeared with what his mind was preoccupied.

"Ruth, would you mind reading to me what Miss Gascoigne says of David?"

"Not at all," said Ruth, conscious that the answer was not perfectly sincere, but at least, she repeated to herself, she ought not to mind; and she took the letter from her desk, running her eye down three of the five pages before she reached the passage in question. "Evelyn wrote to me the other day, very happy in the prospect of getting his commission. He says that your brother is at the head of the new fellows, and a general favourite."

"Thank you," said Jasper, after pausing for a moment in hopes that Ruth would read further. He rightly guessed that she knew it would give him pleasure to hear what followed, but she paused for a moment's deliberation and struggle with herself before proceeding.

"I hope that Isabel is more resigned to her fate in being separated from David. Of course you must miss him too, but you have a resource in Mr. Clinton, who is next best to a brother, just as Evelyn is to me. It is the chance of seeing Evelyn which consoles me for our having to spend the Easter holidays with Aunt Maria instead of at Dyne Court, which I should like much better, if only for the sake of driving into Holmdale to see your dear grave old face." "There," said Ruth, breaking off; "there is no use giving you her rhapsodies about my 'dear, grave old face.'"

"Thank you," Jasper said again, and with more sincerity than before; "Miss Gascoigne does not seem to have any taste for London gaieties."

"I do not imagine that she has tasted them yet. If Sir John ever gives a dinner at home it is to gentlemen, and so she is chiefly in the schoolroom with Madame la Rue, and leads a much quieter life than at Dyne Court."

"She must have almost outgrown the schoolroom," said Jasper.

"I suppose so; but even when she comes out, she will need a duenna of some kind."

"I do not much admire Madame la Rue," said Jasper; and Ruth answered, that "she was very French," in a tone which

rendered it doubtful whether the remark was intended to account for or excuse her defects.

"She has not spoiled her charge, however," said Jasper. "There never was anything less artificial than Miss Gascoigne. She is perfectly transparent, and so warm-hearted."

The discussion of Clara's character — at least when Jasper was the speaker — had an unaccountable tendency to remind Ruth of the lapse of time, and she now observed that she must go and pour out tea. With some self-reproach that he should have lingered so long on his mother's last evening, Jasper bade her good-night, and wrung her hand with unusual warmth, as she charged him with her parting words for Mrs. Clinton.

He went his way, and the Doctor, who had consented to stay to tea, reproached Ruth for her long seclusion.

"He is afraid," said Isabel, "that the Clinton morosity may be infectious, and that if ever there is a Mr. Ruth hung in chains, you will go after him without wishing any of us good-bye."

CHAPTER X.

Kate, like the hazel twig,
Is straight and slender, and as brown in hue
As hazel-nuts, and sweeter than their kernels.
Taming of the Shrew.

MORE than two years went by, with few events to mark the lapse of time, and it was only possible in looking back to note the changes which had gradually taken place. Mrs. Lennox's constant ill health had left its traces on her pale and wasted form; her invalid habits were confirmed, and she now seldom left her sofa. And Ruth too was altered; no longer

Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet.

It was easy to see that the light heart of youth was occupied, perhaps too early, by the deeper feelings, whether of joy or grief, which belong to a riper age. She was thin and slight,

and had in great measure lost the bloom which had redeemed her clear but rather olive complexion from the appearance of ill health. And, though some might think that quiet grace and the thoughtful expression by which she was distinguished compensated for the loss of more regular attractions, this was not the general opinion, so that it became a current saying in Holmdale, "that Miss Lennox had gone off as much as her sister had come on."

Although Isabel had already attained the height of her elder sister, she was a child still. There was the same sweet joyousness in look and tone, the same sunshine in her smile, untouched as yet by the lightest shadow of care. The early promise of beauty was amply fulfilled, for her delicately-moulded features had acquired a more classical regularity, while their colouring was even more brilliant than before. David might well call her a gipsy queen, with those flashing dark eyes, full red lips, and cheeks glowing with rich and sunburnt colour; and her free and careless bearing gave her an additional claim to the name.

David's successful career had been the great interest of these years. He had now left Sandhurst, obtaining his commission without purchase, and, after a brief visit to Holmdale, where he rejoiced Isabel's heart by a private exhibition of his ensign's uniform, he was gone to join his regiment in Ireland, the same to which Evelyn Gascoigne had been gazetted two years before.

Jasper Clinton had also the consciousness of success to cheer him in his more inglorious path, and it had its effect in reconciling him to the lot which he had learned to consider inevitable. His regularity and exactness, and the real ability which lay beneath the crust of reserve, had the few admiring Mr. Dunn, who gradually entrusted him with the more responsible duties of his office, which made the drudgery appear against the necessity of being chained to the desk, while conscious that he was fit for better things, and Ruth could fully sympathise with his repinings, especially since the Doctor often

expressed his admiration of Jasper's application to study in his leisure hours, declaring that he would, with greater advantages, have been distinguished for scholarship.

On this bright summer day, when it is necessary to take up the thread of my story again, Mrs. Lennox's couch had been placed in a sheltered angle of the garden-wall, where she lay, contentedly watching the group before her, and listening to the gay tones which floated by, without being able to distinguish the words. Isabel, in broad-leafed hat and gardening-gloves, was engaged in tying up carnations, while Ruth sat on a bench beside her, weaving a garland of roses for her sister's chestnut hair, and Clara Gascoigne lay on the grass at her feet, still for the moment, except that her bright, restless eyes were ever roaming in search of amusement. She had ridden over from Dyne Court, and something in her attitude betrayed that she was not unconscious of looking very pretty, in her small hat and feather and close-fitting habit.

"You are both so busy," she said, "that I am quite ashamed of taking mine ease; but I cannot tie up carnations in this inconvenient skirt, and I have not genius for weaving garlands. Really, Ruth, that wreath surpasses anything at Madame Devy's."

"I should think so," said Isabel, darting an indignant glance from under the shade of her straw hat, to Clara's infinite amusement.

"I had an indistinct impression that I should rouse Isabel's ire by that innocent remark, although I do not at all know where the offence lies. Do enlighten me, Isabel."

Isabel made no direct reply, but she stooped to eradicate an offending weed, with the half-uttered soliloquy, "Little again! nothing but low and little!"

The words did not escape Clara's quick ear, and she said, with a gay laugh, "That aspersion is *too* personal, for you know that I should of all things like to be as tall as you."

Ruth joined in the laugh, and so did Isabel, although she was thoroughly in earnest.

"You know very well what I meant, Clara," she said;

"but it is really too hot to argue and garden at the same time."

"I am sure that you have been at work quite long enough," said Ruth; "come and sit in the shade."

"Well, I will," said Isabel. She came to sit beside her sister, and, at her bidding, took off her hat, in order that Ruth might place the garland in her hair, and judge of the effect of her handiwork.

"It is charming," exclaimed Clara. "Next time we have a party at Dyne Court, you shall come and weave something for me, since I cannot go to Madame Devy's. But for whom is Isabel making herself so fine to-night?"

"For mamma," replied Isabel, with a contemptuous curl of her full lip, perhaps because she anticipated the incredulity with which the answer was received.

"For mamma, of course. People always wear serge in company, and silk in private life."

Just in time to prevent a rather stormy reply, Mrs. Lennox called Isabel to draw her sofa into the retreating shade, and Ruth took advantage of her absence to take Clara to task in the tone, good-humoured at once and authoritative, which she might have used to a spoiled child, —

"Now, Clara, why will you tease Isabel? you always choose to say the very thing which irritates her."

"You should tell Isabel that it is very wrong to be irritated," replied Clara, while she switched off the heads of the daisies with her riding-whip. "Confess, now, that Isabel is a little — the least in the world — too ready to take offence, and then her anger is so very becoming that I can never forbear to raise it a little more. I wonder whether my eyes ever shine in the same fiery fashion?"

"Never," said Ruth; "they are bright and clear enough, but there is no depth in their brilliancy, because the heart does not shine through."

Clara looked amused, and not at all offended by the severity of the remark. "I understand," she said; "they are glassy, like a fish or a wax doll. Sad work you and Isabel make of me

between you! I have hardly recovered from the reflection on my height when you fall upon my eyes, and, worse than all, you leave me in doubt whether I have a heart. But here comes Mr. Clinton, who must, in common courtesy, undertake my defence. You must know, Mr. Clinton, that Ruth and Isabel accuse me of being no better than an under-sized wax doll!"

"Hear both sides before you decide, Jasper," said Isabel, returning in time to plead a cause which Ruth would never have attempted to defend. "I cannot tell what Ruth may have said just now, but I am sure that it can have been nothing so wicked as I did. Really I could not help being angry, when Clara, instead of enjoying the thrush's song, and the greenness and freshness of the garden, after the dust and turmoil of London, began to talk of the opera, and her balls, and partners. And then she thought she was paying Ruth a compliment when she compared her garland to artificial flowers!"

These words had the effect of checking the ardour with which Jasper had prepared to respond to the appeal, and he spoke in a low and unsteady voice, without raising his eyes, —

"I had hoped that Miss Gascoigne's return was as pleasant to her as it is to us."

"I cannot attempt to compare sensations," said Clara, while her cheek was tinged with that pink glow which enhances beauty without conveying the idea of inconvenient embarrassment; "but certainly I am glad to be at home again, and here especially, where I am more at home than anywhere else. If I had been the slave to dissipation which Isabel supposes, I should not have left town three weeks before papa, to live here in strict seclusion with Madame la Rue."

"Except," said Isabel, "that you told us just now that even Dyne Court was more lively than Belgrave-square, now that London is deserted by all but the lawyers and a fraction of the House of Commons. And only think, Jasper, she says that the drives along the Serpentine are better than any along our river!"

"No," Ruth interposed, with her usual accuracy, "she did

not say that exactly — only that there might be more to see which was worth seeing."

"Ah!" said Clara, with a mock gesture of despair, "I ought to be grateful for that amendment; but it only reminds me that I have returned to the land where there is always some one to catch and cavil at my words. I see that even Mr. Clinton thinks me irreclaimably frivolous."

There was a charm in that little word "even" which chased every cloud from Jasper's brow; and he said, smiling, —

"I am glad that you think me a less severe censor than Isabel."

"Or Ruth," said Clara, mischievously; "Isabel is nothing to Ruth, though she is more measured in her remarks before company. Shall I tell Mr. Clinton what you said just now, Ruth?"

"If you please," said Ruth, with a constrained smile; and Clara sprang up, and caressingly laid her hand on her shoulder.

"No, I shall not; for I know that it was meant for my private edification, — all for my good, as the story-books say. And now I must really go home, for if I leave Madame alone much longer, she will be more voluble than usual in deploring *l'affreuse tristesse de notre château*."

"You will not mind going to the court-yard," said Ruth; "there is a horse-block to mount by."

"Or, perhaps, Mr. Clinton can mount me," said Clara; "if Zohrab has a prejudice, it is against going up to the block."

Jasper's countenance glowed with pleasure; and it was one of those happy moments by which he counted the eras of his life, when Clara's tiny foot rested on his hand, although his assistance was scarcely needed to place her light and springing figure in the saddle. Her next caprice prompted her to show off Zohrab's taste for sugar; and, although the old groom demurred, and said that it was not safe, she insisted that the bit should be taken off. Then she bent over the saddle, balancing herself with graceful daring, until she had induced Zohrab to

take the sugar from her outstretched hand. Isabel was delighted with the animal's docility, Jasper wholly absorbed by admiration of its rider, but Ruth shared the groom's fears.

"It is not safe," she said; "if anything startled Zohrab now that you are leaning over, you must lose your seat."

"I will take care," said Jasper, throwing his arm over the beautiful creature's curved and glossy neck; and since Clara's supply of sugar was exhausted, she permitted the bit to be replaced, again accepting Jasper's assistance in adjusting the reins.

"When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?"

said Isabel, retreating into the three inches of shade afforded by the projecting eaves of an outhouse. "Not in sunshine, I hope. How the sun does beat upon the court!"

"Is it so powerful?" said Clara. "I am a salamander, I suppose, for I had not found out that it was hot. But really, Mr. Clinton, it is shocking of me to have kept you standing so long — and without your hat too."

"It has not been long," said Jasper, stooping in some confusion to recover his hat, which he had thrown aside in order to mount Clara. "Are you sure, Miss Gascoigne, that the stirrup is right?"

"Quite right, thank you. Does not Zohrab stand well? Evelyn bought him for me in Spain, and he is as gentle as he is spirited."

"Like the Arab's horse in the song," said Isabel; but Clara interrupted the impending quotation, declaring that life was not long enough for those long lines.

"Besides," she said, "I wanted to answer your former metrical question, respecting our next meeting. Cannot you all come over on Saturday afternoon to eat strawberries and see the garden, and I will show off Zohrab's other accomplishments? I know you can come, so I will send the carriage at three." She rode off without waiting for a reply, since Zohrab, with all his boasted docility, was beginning to chafe at the delay.

"And now," said Isabel, "the faster we get out of this furnace, and back into the shade, the better."

She led the way, her sister following more leisurely with Jasper. The subject of his meditations presently transpired.

"I suppose that Miss Gascoigne only meant you and Isabel."

"I suppose so," said Ruth, but not very confidently; and this encouraged Jasper to proceed.

"I should not have thought otherwise for a moment if she had not looked towards me when she said 'you all' — at least so I fancied. And she named the very hour for Saturday when she knows that I am disengaged."

"Yes, I remarked that too," said Ruth; "if you like, I will ask mamma what she thinks."

"Oh no, thank you," said Jasper, drawing back, "I would rather give it up at once than have the thing discussed. And by that time I suppose that Sir John will have returned."

"No; I believe that he is not expected till next week," said Ruth, without caring to express her conviction that only in Sir John's absence would Clara have ventured to include Jasper in her invitation. For Madame la Rue was a very manageable duenna, and her views of decorum and of the duty of exclusiveness by no means inconveniently rigid.

"I have not been inside the house at Dyne Court since that Christmas party," said Jasper. It was evident that very slight pressure would have sufficed to vanquish his scruples, but Ruth did not think fit to afford it. She only remarked that the Gascoignes had not passed a Christmas at home since that time.

"No; but if they had been at home, or if they ever again have a Christmas party, I shall not be asked to it. Then I was a school-boy, and David's friend; and now the gulf is widened immeasurably by my position in Mr. Dunn's office."

"I suppose that the Australian mail brought you no letter, or you would have mentioned it," said Ruth; and hopeless as Jasper had just admitted his day-dream to be, he turned from it unwillingly to give his attention to the sober realities of life.

CHAPTER XI.

K. Ph. Patience, good lady! Comfort, gentle Constance!

Const. No; I defy all counsel, all redress,
 But that which ends all counsel, true redress —
 Death! death! O amiable, lovely death!
 " " " Misery's love,
 O come to me!

King John.

On the evening of the same day Ruth and Isabel found their way through the garden into the meadow which sloped down to the river. An old willow flung a gigantic limb across the stream, forming a favourite lair of Isabel's, and there she now ensconced herself. Her hat lay upon the grass, where it was to be found more often than on her head; and the evening breeze played with her curls, and breathed softly on her temples. Ruth leaned against the tree, her eyes cast down to the running water, idly watching the course of the bubbles, as they floated by upon the stream.

The meadow was a common haunt of the sisters on summer evenings, so that Dr. Berkeley must have been prepared to find them there, as he came along the footpath skirting the river's brink. But his appearance was unexpected, since he was usually engaged with Jasper at this hour, and Isabel promptly accused him of playing truant.

"I have seen Clinton, and he has gone home," replied the Doctor, in a tone which startled Ruth.

"Jasper told me," she said, "that he had no letter."

"No; but I have heard from my cousin Frank, to whom I wrote, as you may remember, some months ago, to make inquiries about Mrs. Clinton. I cannot show you the letter, for Clinton took it home with him; but it is a sad story — even more sad than the long suspense led us to expect. Frank applied to the government offices for an account of Richard Clinton, and he was informed that the only convict of that name had made his escape from the settlement more than a year

ago. It was supposed that he had got off in some ship just leaving the port, but nothing certain was known. One of the clerks remembered that inquiries were made after the same Richard Clinton very shortly after he absconded, by a person who can have been no other than his poor wife. He described her to be a tall, striking person, dressed in black; and he added, that he was still haunted by the face of rigid despair with which she turned and left the office. With much difficulty Frank traced her subsequent fate. At last he ascertained from the keeper of a small lodging-house on the quay that a person who bore the initials of B. C. had died there, friendless and unknown. It was of no apparent disease, the woman said, nor yet of absolute want, although it had been necessary to sell her effects to defray the expense of her burial. Frank gathered from what was said that her mind had given way. She refused to speak or eat, and she was found dead one morning, clasping a miniature which the lodging-keeper had put aside in case any attempts should be made to identify her, and now gave over to Frank. He promises to send it home by the first opportunity."

"The miniature of her husband, which was always beside her," said Ruth, as soon as she had found voice to speak. "How terrible! And how will Jasper bear it?"

"There is but one alleviation," said Dr. Berkeley. "She was spared the misery of seeing what he had become; and her last action proves that she died with her love and trust unshaken. Yet Frank writes that he was reputed to be one of the worst characters in the settlement — reckless and unprincipled, while his ability and superior education gave him great and dangerous influence over his associates."

"And you told all this to Jasper?" said Ruth.

"I gave him the letter. He would not have been satisfied otherwise; and, indeed, when so much was inevitably painful, it seemed useless to attempt a partial revelation. But I hardly think he took in anything at the time except his mother's fate."

"I should think not," said Isabel, shuddering; "to know that she died alone, and in a strange land!"

"*Je mourrai seul*," said the Doctor, thoughtfully; "so I

believe we must all find it when we come to die; and the faces gathered round the bed may not detain us when our eyes are opening to 'the land which is very far off.' "

In general Ruth liked to follow such a train of thought, but now she could not turn her mind from the tragedy just disclosed. "You know," she said, "that in the only letter Jasper received from his mother, written from the ship before she landed, she said that she had been ill all through the voyage; and I suppose that she was too weak to bear the disappointment, and it broke her heart."

"And unsettled her mind, so I gather from Frank's account. Something in her eye always made me fear that she was on the verge of insanity, and but for this she would not have died without leaving one parting word for Jasper. He seemed to feel this most acutely."

"I believe she did not care for Jasper in the least, or she would never have left him to go after her wicked husband," said Isabel, decidedly; and though Ruth demurred to assent to such a sweeping clause, she allowed that the one absorbing passion of Mrs. Clinton's life had left little scope for other affections.

The dew was falling, and the Doctor would not suffer the young ladies to linger in the meadow, Isabel cutting short his warning against the danger of evening exhalations by a laughing accusation that he was afraid of the rheumatism for himself. But she was forced to admit that the advice was disinterested, while she retraced her steps with her sister, and watched his tall and somewhat ungainly form still sauntering beside the river. "We must not tell mamma to-night, it would only give her a sleepless night," said Ruth, and Isabel readily complied with the injunction. Her feelings, however strongly excited, soon again subsided, and there was little effort in her gaiety. It was otherwise with Ruth. The evening was her mother's best time, and in general the time slipped too fast away, but now the hour for prayers seemed to tarry. In David's absence it was her office to read, and her voice faltered when she came to the petition for the fatherless and the orphan, and thought of him who, now an orphan, and worse than fatherless, was alone

with his grief in his cheerless home. Mrs. Lennox did not observe her agitation, but she attributed her wan looks to the heat of the day, and she would not suffer her to linger as usual for more last words after Isabel had retired.

At length, then, Ruth was alone, and free to dwell on the sad story, chiefly as it affected Jasper. She recalled the store of promises by which she had already had occasion to subdue her own unchastened spirit; but it had been more easy to take the lesson home than to apply it to another. For herself, she knew that it was good to bear the yoke in her youth, and she had begun to taste the sweetness of the discipline; but it was hard to believe that the same discipline would avail for Jasper. His spirit was already crushed and embittered by the nature of his trial, and she feared lest this fresh blow should depress him into despair just as he was beginning to recover a more healthy tone of mind. Here she was checked by a pang of self-reproach, as she discovered how exclusively she viewed the matter in its relations to Jasper, with scarcely a thought of Mrs. Clinton, or of his wretched father's more hapless fate. It is, she thought, only one form of self-seeking, and she knelt down and hid her face, feeling that in prayer alone there was safety.

On the following morning Ruth imparted the Doctor's intelligence to her mother, who was, as she had anticipated, much affected by it. In the memory of her early friendship with Barbara Maylin, their subsequent estrangement was forgotten, and Mrs. Lennox dwelt upon her youthful attractions, and upon the heroic devotion which marked the closing scene of her most unhappy life. For Jasper also her sympathy and interest were warmly excited, and she was the first to make the suggestion from which a certain degree of consciousness had restrained Ruth, that he should be invited to occupy David's room for a few days.

"It is grievous," Mrs. Lennox said, "to think of him alone in that melancholy house." So Ruth set off for Bean-street after breakfast; she believed that Jasper would go to the office as usual, and that she should only see Martha, and though

Mrs. Lennox thought otherwise, it was not an occasion for standing too rigidly on proprieties.

The house looked dreary, with every blind drawn down, and the aspect of Martha's countenance, when she opened the door, was more sinister than ever. She had resented all other inquiries as a studied insult, but she did justice to Ruth's heart-felt interest, and withdrew her person, at first planted on the threshold in the attitude of defiance, so as to admit her into the entrance-passage, while a sigh, or rather a groan, accompanied the ejaculation of, "Ah well, Miss Lennox!"

"Has Mr. Clinton gone to the office?" Ruth asked.

"Not yet, Miss Lennox, though he is mad enough to say he will go. He has but just left his room, and I have taken him a cup of strong coffee, which is good for the nerves; so I hope you can wait a few minutes. It's most like he won't touch it if you go in now and upset him."

"I can wait as long as you please," said Ruth, "if you will let me sit down in your room."

And Martha led the way to her clean, tidy kitchen, glad of the opportunity to pour out her griefs.

"Poor dear Master Jasper, he came in last night looking scared and stupified, and just put the letter into my hand, for he was not able to speak. Then he went and shut himself up in his room, and never looked up when I came in with a light, but just asked for the letter again; and I believe that he sat up till morning, for the light was shining under his door when I went to bed, which was late enough, and indeed there was the best part of a candle burnt down to the socket. And if he did get a little sleep towards morning, Mr. Ball, overhead, must have woke him, since he chose this of all days of the year to put on a new pair of creaking boots. And then he seemed to expect me to make his buttered toast for breakfast, just as if nothing had happened."

"Perhaps he was not aware of Mr. Clinton's loss," Ruth suggested, in extenuation of the first-floor lodger's unfeeling conduct.

"Well, I can't say," rejoined Martha, in the same ex-

asperated tone; "if he is in ignorance, he is the only person in this blessed town who is. I have been so put about by inquiries, Mrs. Dunn sending to ask after Mr. Clinton, and the very baker-boy wanting to know the truth of the story. Dr. Berkeley means well, 'I dare say, but he is no better than a sieve."

"Dr. Berkeley," said Ruth, "told me last night that he should go round by Mr. Dunn's, to tell him that Mr. Clinton would most likely be unequal to going to the office to-day."

"He is no more equal to it than a baby, Miss Lennox," said Martha, taking up the corner of her apron to wipe away the tears which only the strongest emotion could have wrung from those glazed eyes. "It would melt a heart of stone to see him with a face like ashes, and his hands trembling, and not able to speak or shed a tear. Won't you go in to him now, and see if you can do anything for him?"

Although Ruth quailed from the thought of witnessing sufferings which she felt herself wholly unable to relieve, she suffered Martha to show her into the little parlour, which she had not entered since Mrs. Clinton's departure. Martha's account of Jasper's appearance was not overcharged, but the face of stony wretchedness relaxed when Ruth entered; he arose, and wrung her hand, still retaining it with a nervous pressure, as he said, "It is very kind of you to come."

Ruth was ashamed of the thrill of gladness with which she recalled Mrs. Clinton's prediction that when real trouble came, Jasper would turn to her for sympathy, as he had formerly done. Her low and tearful answer, "Oh, Jasper, I am so sorry; I have thought of you so much," availed more to soothe his chafed spirit than the best chosen words of consolation.

"That there is some one still to care" — was all he said, as he turned his face away; and she knew that the gasping sob and tears which followed, must bring relief. "I could bear anything," he added, when he had recovered his voice, "anything but the knowledge that she died alone, perhaps from neglect and want, when I should have been there. I suffered my pitiful fear of shame to prevail, and would not go."

"Your mother wished it to be so," said Ruth; but her words

could not stem the torrent of self-accusation. After a time he became more composed, and although resolved to decline Mrs. Lennox's invitation to the Red House, he was submissive to Ruth's entreaty that he would relinquish his intention of attending the office as usual. Indeed, the severe headache which followed any agitation rendered him incapable of exertion, and he lay down among the cushions, so temptingly arranged by Ruth's practised hands. There she left him, under Martha's charge, who, as she moved about with noiseless steps, hoped to goodness that Mr. Ball would find patients enough to keep him and his creaking boots out of the house for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER XII.

She trembles her fan in a sweetness dumb,
As her thoughts were beyond recalling;
With a glance for *one*, and a glance for *some*,
From her eyelids rising and falling,
Speaks common words with a blushful air,
Hears bold words unrepining;
But her silence says — what she never will swear —
And love seeks truer loving.

E. B. BROWNING.

SOME days passed, and Jasper still kept away from the Red House. Ruth's only knowledge respecting him was obtained from Mrs. Dunn, who, in the course of a morning visit, mentioned that he had only been absent one day from the office, and was now at work again, looking much as usual, Mr. Dunn said, except, poor fellow, for the crape round his hat.

When Mrs. Dunn was gone, Mrs. Lennox observed that it was a pity Jasper shut himself up so much, and Ruth assented very briefly, for she was more grieved and disappointed than she cared to own. She still hoped that he only deferred his visit until Saturday afternoon, forgetting their engagement to go to Dyne Court, and she felt an increasing distaste for this same engagement when the day came. The clouds were gather-

ing, and she hoped that the carriage might not be sent for them, after all; but the lowering morning cleared into a bright and sultry day, and the Dyne Court barouche, with its pair of prancing bays, drew up to the door even before the appointed hour. And while Ruth was unwillingly putting away her drawing materials, before she went to fetch her bonnet, Clara herself entered the room, looking bright and buoyant in her gossamer dress.

"You see," she said, "I have come in person to carry you off, for I had a presentiment that you intended to send Isabel, and stay at home yourself. Confess, now, that you had some such treacherous intention."

"I believe," said Ruth, "that I was thinking how hot it was to go junketing."

"Oh very! — to take an easy drive in an open carriage and then to sit in the shade of the noble chestnuts, instead of baking in this very worthy little oven, or walking along the glaring and dusty pavements. If I had said anything so inconsequent, how severe you would have been."

"Well, I will go; but I shall want to be back early because of mamma. I will get my bonnet, and see if she has anything to say before we go. Isabel is ready, and in the garden."

Ruth was not away many minutes, and Clara amused herself by flitting about the room in her usual desultory fashion; striking a few chords on the piano, singing snatches of the last fashionable song, and turning over the books upon the table, while she raised her eyebrows with a mixture of horror and amusement at their instructive character. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* was the most modern specimen to be found there; a well-thumbed school edition of Horace, scrawled over with David's name, not the most ancient. While thus engaged, the door was thrown hastily open, but Jasper lingered with his hand upon the lock when he perceived that Clara was the only inmate of the room.

"I beg your pardon," he said, colouring deeply, "I expected to find Ruth here."

"She will be down immediately; will you not come in?" said

Clara, but Jasper still hesitated, and she was piqued to discover that she was not as usual his first thought.

At this moment Ruth appeared, and Clara again turned to Jasper.

"Perhaps, Mr. Clinton, you will be so good as to call Isabel from the garden, for I don't like to keep the horses standing in the sun."

Jasper complied with the request, but returning almost immediately, he went up to Ruth and said, in a low, agitated voice —

"Cannot I see you alone for one moment before you go?"

"Oh, yes; you will not mind waiting, Clara?" said Ruth; but Clara's assent was not ready.

"I am afraid that we ought to go; papa did not wish me to keep the horses out longer than I could help."

Sir John's wishes did not in general meet with such dutiful attention, and in sun and rain alike, the bright bays were well used to champ their bits before the door of the Red House. However, Ruth did not care to argue the point, and she told Jasper that she should be at home by six o'clock, if he could come to see her then.

"Very well," said Jasper.

"I wish, Mr. Clinton," added Clara, gaily, "that you would come with us, and then you might talk as much as you please. But I suppose that Mr. Dunn would accuse me of aiding and abetting you to play truant, if I were to carry you off."

Jasper's attempt to smile was miserably unsuccessful, and Ruth unwillingly followed Clara to the carriage, and left him standing in the doorway, little dreaming how long she was to be haunted by the recollection of that haggard and sorrow-stricken face. The working of the lines about the mouth betrayed nervous agitation, and his eyes looked hollow and sleepless, and burned with a feverish light.

"How wretchedly Mr. Clinton looks!" said Clara, nestling luxuriously into her corner of the barouche. "Mr. Dunn saw papa last night on business, ending, as usual, with the latest

Holmdale intelligence, so that I had heard of Mrs. Clinton's death, but I was scarcely prepared to see her so sincerely lamented. She was not an attractive old lady, was she? And then it must be a relief to know that one's father is no longer a convict, but a gentleman at large."

Clara's levity of tone so wounded Ruth that she made no attempt to reply, and Clara was ready, as usual, in part to justify, in part to explain away her words.

"Now, Ruth, don't look as if you thought me an inhuman monster; I only knew Mrs. Clinton by reputation, but I am ready to admire her son's dutiful respect for her memory, since you think it admirable. Only when people are so desperately woe-begone they should retire into private life, for it is scarcely fair to inflict their miseries on the world at large."

"On those at least who flutter through the world, butterfly fashion, without thought or care for others; but Jasper did not expect to see you when he came."

"Enough," said Clara, holding up her hands, as if to avert a coming blow; "Isabel, can *you* say nothing young and foolish to avert Ruth's indignation from my devoted head?"

"It would be of no use," said Isabel, laughing; "Ruth never says such things to me."

"Because I do not think them," said Ruth, while tears gathered in her eyes; "I don't know how it is, Clara, that *you* will always force me to speak bitter truths, when it would be better to be silent, even though they *are* truths. And then I am sorry for it afterwards."

"Why should you be sorry, or vex yourself for what never vexes me? You are privileged to say anything, and *Ruth* is near allied to *truth*. I will do anything to satisfy you — short of wearing mourning for Mrs. Clinton."

She could not win a smile from Ruth on this subject, although she was ready to talk of other matters, asking whether Sir John had brought any friends with him from London.

"Yes; there is Mr. Lewis, who is an excellent type of papa's friends — substantial and agricultural, a magistrate and a county member. And then there is Lord Edward Lynmere,

also an M. P., but of a different stamp. He is a rising young man, and one of my *preux chevaliers*, so that I am rather glad that you should see him. Ah, it is Isabel's turn to look indignant now."

"One of your partners, I suppose," said Isabel, subsiding, though she had certainly felt inclined to resent any unworthy use of the terms of chivalry.

And Clara answered demurely —

"Precisely; his name has been so often written on my tablets that it is quite engrained there. He began his career as an ardent politician; but towards the end of the season he favoured me with more of his eloquence than Mr. Speaker. I always look bored by any allusion to politics; and he seems to be as much charmed by my frivolity as if I talked *Hansard*."

"And so you do your utmost to weaken his chances of distinction," said Ruth.

"He seems satisfied," rejoined Clara, carelessly. "However, you are welcome to give him a taste of solid acquirements, in case they suit him better. It may be as well to try some tolerably modern subject — not earlier than the Wittenagemot, if you can accomplish it."

After passing the afternoon in Lord Edward's society, Isabel was ready to admit that the term of *preux chevalier* was not misapplied.

"It was strange," she observed to Ruth, in the course of their drive home, "to see any one so stately and strong, with his Vandyke face, and his grand, courteous manner, subdued by a look or smile from Clara. He was always on the watch to discover her wishes, and never so happy as when she sent him on her errands. I thought it rather humiliating, especially when she sent him the second time through the sun, because he had not brought the parasol she fancied; and I could not help feeling that she deserved to be treated like Kunigund —

Er wirft ihr den Handschuh ins Gesicht :
Den Dank, Dame, begehrt ich nicht,
Und verlässt sie zur selben Stunde."

Ruth smiled a half assent, observing —

Still Waters.

"Sunny as it was, crossing that strip of gravel was not such a service of danger as rescuing the glove from the lion and the tiger."

"Well, but, Ruth, I am sure that you would not order people about in that way."

"You are more likely than I, Isabel, to have such power to abuse. I do not mean just now, for such are not your relations with David."

"Not exactly," said Isabel, laughing at the recollection of her implicit subjection to his will; "and I believe it is the contrast which makes me think that Clara and Lord Edward are reversing the natural order of things. Even Jasper, who is often ceremoniously polite, does less for you than you do for him. However, it is not quite the same thing, for I suppose that Lord Edward is in love with her."

The last words were spoken diffidently, since the elder sister did not encourage any discussion of that mysterious passion which was already the subject of many of Isabel's secret musings. And, accordingly, Ruth only answered —

"So it seems."

"And I think that Clara must be in love too, or she would not talk and laugh so much with him."

"I imagine that if she really cared for him, she would talk and laugh less. But it is impossible to tell what Clara thinks, or if she thinks at all."

"I can tell you one thing, Ruth, that Clara is really fond of you. She took so much pains to bring you and Lord Edward together, and tried to talk of the things you care about; and it was rather provoking that you did not make yourself half so pleasant as you do to Miss Perrott."

"No," said Ruth, with another of her half smiles; "Miss Perrott is much more in my line."

"But really, Ruth," said Isabel, pleadingly, "there is no harm in being pleasant and wellbred, and no merit in talking scandal and small gossip."

"Clara and Lord Edward were talking great gossip,"

answered Ruth; "only in a light sparkling way, and we did not know the people."

"No; which made it seem like an amusing story. You will allow that it was more amusing than Miss Perrott's conversation."

"I don't know that it was more satisfying. But then I do not mind being bored," said Ruth, in a matter-of-fact voice which contrasted curiously with her sister's eager expostulation.

"My dear Ruth! You never shall persuade me on high moral grounds to like Miss Perrott better than Lord Edward."

"Lord Edward is very well in his way; but I don't like to hear you always running down Holmdale."

"Not always, Ruth; only when we are quite in private life. I shall never whisper to Miss Perrot my preference for Lord Edward, nor tell her that I like Zohrab better than either. Ah, Ruth! if ever I coveted my neighbour's horse, it should be an Arab."

CHAPTER XIII.

He is dead to me,
And I must soon
Die to him, and many things; and, mark me,
Breathe not his name, lest this love-pamper'd heart
Should sicken to vain yearnings — lost! lost! lost!

Saint's Tragedy.

THE discussion was ended by their arrival at home; only just in time, as Isabel remarked, for the black curtain of clouds had again closed over their heads, and the oppressive stillness of the air and a lurid light in the west were presages of a coming storm.

The clock had struck six; but Jasper was not waiting for them, as his habitual punctuality led Ruth to expect.

"He must soon be here," she thought, as she ran up to her mother's room; but she was presently obliged to admit that he would probably be too weather-wise to venture out of shelter

that evening. The darkened room was illumined by a flash of lightning, followed almost instantaneously by the sharp crack of the thunder. A few large and sullen drops were beginning to fall, and there was a low sighing of the wind, as if the elements were collecting force to break loose in all their fury. Mrs. Lennox, ever affected by any change of atmosphere, was nervous and discomposed; and Ruth attempted to divert her thoughts by recounting the day's adventures. Isabel threw in a word occasionally; but she had placed her chair as near the window as her mother's fears would allow, and was soon absorbed in watching the progress of the storm.

It was soon raging in all its violence, the rain streaming down in torrents, and the thunder pealing, as it seemed, over the house itself. In such a tumult Sally's modest knock was unheard, and she was constrained to open the door and ask for Miss Lennox. Since Ruth had undertaken the charge of household affairs, such appeals occurred too often to attract attention; and as she went out into the passage she instinctively sought her bunch of keys, prepared to comply with a demand for brown sugar or kitchen candles.

"If you please, miss," said Sally, "a person has come to ask whether you know where Mr. Clinton is."

"Is it Martha?" Ruth asked hurriedly; and with a sudden foreboding of evil. "I will see her."

"It is not Martha, miss. The gentleman, Mr. Dunn, told me not to give his name; but then he asked so many questions, I thought it best to come to you."

"I will go to him," said Ruth, quickly descending the stairs.

Mr. Dunn stood in the hall, the rain-drops streaming off his macintosh and umbrella, as if to confirm her misgiving that only urgent necessity could have brought him out in such weather. But his manner, always imperturbable, was only distinguished by an additional shade of stiffness.

"Good evening, Miss Lennox. I am sorry that you should trouble yourself to come downstairs, since I merely called to inquire if Clinton was here."

"He was here between twelve and one," said Ruth, "and he promised to come back this evening. But I suppose the rain prevented him."

"Between twelve and one," repeated Mr. Dunn, deliberately; "very good." And with another apology for having disturbed her, he left the house before Ruth had gained courage to ask the cause of these inquiries.

"I will tell you what I have heard, Miss Lennox," Sally said, drawing nearer to Ruth, in order to convey the intelligence in a mysterious whisper; "it may be all a lie, of course, but Mrs. Benson has come in with the wash, and she do say that there is a talk all over the town how Mr. Clinton has gone off with ever so much money, as his father did before him."

With white lips, which belied the haughty confidence of her tone, Ruth disclaimed any interest in such idle gossip. Yet Mrs. Lennox perceived that something was amiss, when she re-entered the dressing-room, and she asked what Sally had wanted.

"Mr. Dunn called to ask for Jasper. I suppose he wanted him on business."

"It must have been pressing business which brought Mr. Dunn out on such a night as this," said Isabel. "He has a cat-like horror of wetting his feet, and, if ever guilty of a quotation, he would say that it was 'a naughty night to swim in.'"

Ruth made no reply, but took up her knitting again, to the great detriment of the delicate feathery pattern; the needles would not obey her fingers, the stitches fell off, and all was soon in inextricable confusion. She laid it aside, and said, abruptly, "Mamma, may I go to Bean-street, and see if Jasper is there?"

"Not in this rain, dear; wait at least till the storm is over." Mrs. Lennox answered in a tone which was imploring rather than authoritative, and Ruth acquiesced, feeling that the request was as unreasonable as she tried to hope her fears might be.

After a few disjointed remarks, the party subsided into uneasy silence, and Ruth sat and listened to every sound with feverish eagerness. The house-door was opened, and again

shut, and before Isabel spoke, Ruth recognised the deliberate tread of Dr. Berkeley, ascending the stair. He was an habitual and admitted visitor to Mrs. Lennox's dressing-room, and entered without apology; but it was easy to see that he had come this evening on no pleasant errand.

Fearless as ever, Isabel asked the question, which Ruth's lips were powerless to utter: "Can you tell us what brought Mr. Dunn here after Jasper, on a Saturday night too, when all business ought to be wound up for the week?"

"Then you have not heard the report?" said the Doctor.

"What report?" Isabel asked, and Dr. Berkeley looked wistfully at Ruth, and told his story with less than his usual distinctness.

It was briefly this. Jasper returned to the office after his hurried visit to the Red House, and remained there until three o'clock, the hour at which it closed on Saturdays. He waited until the other clerks were gone, and then requested the advance of his half-year's salary, not yet due. His nervous and agitated manner led Mr. Dunn to believe that the request was in some way connected with his mother's death,¹ and he complied without hesitation. He gave Jasper a cheque on the bank, and desired him to draw at the same time 200*l.* on Sir John Gascoigne's account, as Sir John had directed him to bring that sum to Dyne Court on the following morning.

"I believed that I might trust Clinton with untold gold," said Mr. Dunn, in detailing the circumstances to Dr. Berkeley; "his high sense of honour, his exactness and business-like habits, seemed to entitle him to the fullest confidence." He became uneasy, however, when the hour for closing the bank elapsed, and Jasper had not returned with the sum in question. He sent to Bean-street, and learned that he had not been at home since the morning. He went himself in search of the bank-clerk, and ascertained that Jasper had drawn the full amount of his own cheque, as well as that on Sir John Gascoigne's account. And, for the last two hours, Mr. Dunn had been fruitlessly endeavouring to discover some trace of him. He applied

to Dr. Berkeley among others, to whom he was more communicative than he had been to Ruth.

There was silence when the tale was told, the other three anxiously waiting for Ruth to speak first, in hopes of her throwing some light on the matter. But Ruth sat still, her lips compressed, her mother's hand firmly clasped in hers; and at last Mrs. Lennox said —

"Does Mr. Duan really suspect him of having absconded with the money? I can hardly believe it possible."

"It is *not* possible," said Ruth; and as she pressed her lips against her mother's hand, her tears fell hot upon it.

"Then what are we to believe?" said Dr. Berkeley.

"You may believe what you please," said Ruth, calmly enough; but the Doctor evidently felt, and was wounded by the suppressed bitterness of the reply.

"I assure you," he said, "that I am unwilling — as unwilling as yourself — to condemn young Clinton, and I fully acquit him of any premeditated fraud. But his mind was unhinged by the news of his mother's death, he felt miserable and unsettled, and his old dislike to his position here had probably revived in full force. The temptation to avail himself of the means of escape placed within his reach may have appeared irresistible; and if he had once turned his back on Holmdale, he would feel that the step was irretrievable, however soon remorse might follow."

Mrs. Lennox acquiesced in this explanation, while Ruth only looked scornful and indignant; and she scarcely waited until the Doctor had finished speaking to repeat her former request.

"Mamma, may I go to Bean-street?"

"If you wish it, dear," said Mrs. Lennox, instinctively feeling that Ruth must not be this time gainsaid. Former misgivings revived, and she felt that it was an interest in the fate of one dearer than a brother which had blanched Ruth's face and lips, and quite overthrown her habitual composure.

"I may go too, mamma; the rain never hurts me," said Isabel, scarcely waiting for her mother's permission before she

left the room. The rain was over by the time the sisters were equipped; and, as they passed along the narrow pavement, their progress was arrested more than once by the knots of idlers who gathered round the doors in busy colloquy. The snatches of conversation which reached their ears did not leave the subject of interest in doubt.

"Treading in his father's footsteps," one said; and another observed, "that he had always a *down* look, which could come to no good."

Ruth had scarcely asked herself what she was to gain by this visit to Bean-street; and Martha, by whom she was eagerly welcomed, had nothing to impart which was not already known to the whole town, except her own private conviction that Jasper was the injured party.

"Poor dear Master Jasper," she said, querulously; "if this was not the wickedest town in the kingdom, they would be content to take his life without taking his good name too. Depend upon it, he has been robbed and murdered on the highway, and his body thrown into the river. And, would you believe it, Miss Lennox, the constable, who ought to be looking after the murderers, is set to watch this very house, and take him to prison as soon as ever he comes home. As I told the man, he ought to be ashamed to lay hands on a much honester man than himself, for Mr. Clinton never touched a sixpence which was not his own, and paid all his bills regular and weekly; and to my knowledge Jack Lettice has a long score at the baker's."

"You have not seen Mr. Clinton since the morning?" said Ruth, recalling Martha from her indignant sense of the constable's delinquencies.

"Not since breakfast, Miss Lennox; if breakfast I should call it, for he put nothing in his mouth; and when I spoke to him about it, he just smiled in his grave way, and promised to do better at dinner. He seemed more put about this morning than he has been at all; and looked as if he had not been to bed at all. He went away to the office, and I got his chops ready as usual, but he never came home, — so that's where it is."

"And you do not know where he went?"

"Well," said Martha, mysteriously, "I would not tell Mr. Dunn, though he asked as many questions as if I had been on my oath; but it's safe enough with you. The miller's boy was here with some flour, and he did say that he saw Mr. Clinton walking fast over the bridge above the mill at four o'clock. It's my belief that he was robbed and murdered as I said, or else killed by the thunder and lightning and burnt to ashes, and so we shall never know; and I only hope he is better off, poor boy, for they gave him no peace in this life."

Nothing was to be gained from this incoherent invective. Ruth was sick at heart, faint, and weary, and she whispered to Isabel that they had better return home. She bade Martha tell her all she heard, and engaged to do the same, and then she wished her good-night, though she felt the words to be a mockery, when she looked again at the hard-featured face, so wretched, restless, and care-worn in its expression.

It was growing dusk; Ruth was not so much absorbed by grief as to be unmindful of others, and she discovered something of timidity in Isabel's closer approach to her side, while she slipped her hand within her sister's.

"I hope," Ruth said, tenderly, "that Martha has not infected you with her foolish fancies. There has not been a highway robbery within the memory of man in this neighbourhood; and it is simply impossible that it should have been attempted in open day between the Bank and Mr. Dunn's house. Since he did not go there at once, something of which we know nothing must have taken him elsewhere."

"I was thinking," said Isabel, in a low, thrilling whisper, "of the place where he was last seen. Do you remember how deep a pool the river makes beside the weir? And I believe that Jasper is one of those who think death better than dishonour."

Ruth shivered, for Isabel had put into words her own secret dread; yet even in so doing, her confidence was restored.

"Not so," she said; "he might crave for death, and look

and long for it; but he would no more dare to take his own life than to take the money of another man."

"Then what *do* you think has happened to him, Ruth?"

"I do not know; perhaps we never shall know in this life. His name will be blasted: you see that even the Doctor gives him up on the first breath of suspicion. But, until I hear the worst from his own lips, I shall disbelieve it all."

In her earnest tone there was something approaching to exultation; but this quickly gave place to depression and disappointment when she related to her mother the particulars of their fruitless errand. Self-control, however, had returned, and she seemed only desirous to let the subject rest. She employed herself in unravelling her tangled work, and to all appearance was fully absorbed by the occupation of taking up and letting down her stitches. But, as Mrs. Lennox lay and watched her profile, it was easy to read its wistful, waiting expression of intense anxiety; and she only wished to relax the strain by which such unnatural composure was maintained.

"Ruth, come to me," she said, when Isabel had gone to bed, and they were left together. And Ruth came to her own low seat beside the sofa, and hid her face in her hands.

"Was he then so dear?" said Mrs. Lennox.

"I loved him," said Ruth, and the words were broken by a sobbing sigh; "but oh, mamma, that is not the worst. He wished to speak to me this morning, and I saw that there was something on his mind, but Clara hurried me away. If I had stayed, all might have been prevented, and I shall never forgive myself — never forget his face of misery and perplexity."

"You were not to blame," said Mrs. Lennox, soothingly; "but have you any suspicion of what he wished to speak?"

"I have none," answered Ruth, briefly.

"I wonder whether his disappearance can in any way be connected with that attachment of which you once told me. Was he still constant to his first love?"

"I — I believe so," faltered Ruth; and Mrs. Lennox was remorseful for having drawn the admission from her.

"My poor child!" she said, lovingly, tenderly; for a moment Ruth's eyes quivered with tears which were not all of bitterness. The story of her life for the last two years was known; she had loved Jasper, and her love was unrequited; she had never loved him so entirely as now, when the only certainty respecting his fate consisted in the irretrievable dishonour with which his name was branded. For dishonesty is not one of the many crimes on which the children of this world can afford to pass a lenient judgment. All this her mother knew, and yet she did not blame nor despise such weakness, nor do aught but pity her.

Silently Ruth kissed her mother, and received her whispered blessing. Wearily she laid herself down, after seeking in vain to collect her thoughts for more than a broken, still-recurring prayer:

"Oh God, keep him safe! Oh God, make me patient!" She lay long awake, and when sleep at last closed her heavy eyelids, it brought no repose. The turn of the river of which Isabel had spoken, was brought vividly before her; and just as she approached its brink, she heard a sullen splash of waters, although no trace remained of the object which had passed through them, save the circles widening round. She tried to spring forward, but her feet seemed to be glued to the ground; and in the attempt to give utterance to stifled screams of terror, she awoke, trembling in every limb, and with a cold sweat upon her brow.

CHAPTER XIV.

The bubble reputation.

As You Like It.

RUTH and Isabel were at breakfast when Mr. Dunn rode by the windows on his strong black horse.

"I suppose," Ruth said, "that he is on his way to Dyne Court, to tell Sir John, and ask him what is to be done."

"Because it is his money. I had not thought of that. Oh, Ruth, Clara can do anything with Sir John, and a word from you might set all right; at least make them give up trying to find him. Cannot you go to Dyne Court, or write and ask Clara to come here?"

"Oh no," said Ruth, shrinking from the suggestion; "I could not see Clara."

"Not if it would be of use to Jasper?"

"It would be of no use. I believe the best we can hope is, that he may be found and brought back. Then the truth must be known, and he will be cleared."

"Then why, Ruth, should he have gone off in this way?"

"I don't know; I am tired of wondering, and I can't talk of it. Let us go to the school, Isabel dear, and try to gather some Sunday thoughts."

"I did not mean to vex you, Ruth," whispered Isabel, as she twined her arm round her sister's waist, and pressed her soft cheek to her lips. Ruth returned the embrace and answered, hurriedly:

"You have not vexed me, dear; I am vexed with myself, because I have no patience."

Patience was sorely needed this Sunday morning. On the way to the school the sisters were accosted by several of their acquaintance, anxious to know if there were any tidings of "that unfortunate young man." Ruth found her class dull of comprehension, fidgety, and unruly, and the silence which she was unable to enforce reigned while the teacher of a neighbouring class spoke of Mr. Clinton to the schoolmistress in a mysterious and perfectly audible whisper. Even in church she was not safe from the subject. Mr. Smith, the vicar, was, as the Doctor mildly remarked, "not satisfactory." The living was small, and his family large, so he took pupils and kept no curate, considering that his clerical duties were amply fulfilled by the impressive character of his sermons. There could be no question respecting the impression which he made that day; when he gave out the text, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," there was an audible rustling of silks, as

ladies settled themselves in an attitude of awakened attention, nor did he disappoint the expectations thus excited. His pointed allusions to Jasper's mysterious disappearance called the indignant colour to the cheeks of Ruth and Isabel, while the greater part of the congregation returned home to discuss the sermon and their roast beef, together with the additional zest of self-complacency.

"What a shame!" exclaimed Isabel, as soon as they had passed through the churchyard gate.

And Ruth's lip quivered, as she replied:

"It shows Jasper's utter friendlessness, that Mr. Smith should say such things, knowing that there is not one who has the right to protest against his being condemned unheard."

They passed the Dyne Court carriage, standing at Mr. Dunn's door; but it was empty, to Ruth's great relief. She was not, however, to escape the dreaded infliction, for Clara had already alighted at the Red House, and waylaid her in the passage.

"Are you here?" Ruth said, with undissembled annoyance; "I must go up-stairs to see how mamma is."

"No, I have you first," said Clara, firmly clasping Ruth's hand; "Isabel may perform that filial duty, and you shall come into the study with me, not for long," she added, pleadingly; "do be amiable for once. If you are so morose, I shall conclude that you are afraid of revealing some secret which it might be convenient to know."

Rather than to continue the discussion on the stairs for Sarah's benefit, Ruth suffered her tormentor to lead her into the study, and there prepared with what philosophy she might for the examination which was to follow.

"Now, Ruth, you shall tell me all about this shocking story of Mr. Clinton."

"If I knew more than you do," said Ruth, resolutely, "I would not say one syllable to one who only intends to make light of it."

"If I were not in earnest, Ruth, I should not have come

straight from church without going back for luncheon, though I am always particularly hungry on Sundays, and Lord Edward was unusually agreeable. Seriously, I was quite shocked when Mr. Dunn came in with the news; but that was ages ago — before we had done breakfast — and the more I think of it, the more incredible it seems. Mr. Clinton was always held up as a model of goodness by you, who are many degrees better than the rest of the world. And then it occurs to me — but of course I may be wrong — that my money, or papa's, which is much the same thing, is the very last which one would naturally expect him to abscond with."

And Clara looked up, an arch smile dimpling her cheeks, while a very becoming smile enhanced their bloom. Ruth turned her head away in the struggle to reply with calmness, "Nothing is astonishing, Clara, except that you should first assume his guilt, and then speak of it lightly."

"Then you do not believe it? However, you must not be too severe on me for falling into the vulgar error, for papa and Mr. Dunn have so little doubt on the matter, that the only question between them was, what measures must be taken to apprehend him — for the poor young man's own sake, as papa says, and not because he is anxious to recover the money. And by the way, Ruth, it occurs to me that Mr. Clinton must have come here yesterday for the sake of confiding his designs to you. He looked extremely disconcerted when I carried you off."

"So I believe," said Ruth; and the gravity of this reply provoked Clara's merriment.

"So you believe! It was more than I did when I said so. My dear Ruth! I suppose you will say next, that if he *had* asked your advice, you would have sanctioned his proceedings!"

"Laugh if you will," said Ruth; "laugh off, if you can, *your* share of responsibility, in not suffering me to wait and hear what he had to say. As long as I live I shall not forget my own."

"Or perhaps, Ruth, you may acquiesce as readily in another bright idea which has come into my head. You take his de-

fection as much to heart as if there had been something closer than the philosophical friendship which I had imagined to be your only bond of union."

Here Clara paused, sobered by the effect of her light words, which cut so deep. Ruth hid her face in an agony of shame and humiliation, her colour went and came, and she strove in vain to stem the torrent of an uncontrollable burst of tears. Clara, who had hitherto considered her impassible, was terrified by her hysterical sobs, and clung about her, imploring "Ruth, her dear Ruth," to look up and speak to her, not to cry, not to mind her foolish words. She drew down the hands with which Ruth had covered her face, and fondled and caressed them; but such endearments could not restore Ruth's self-control.

Just then the carriage stopped at the door, and Clara rightly judged that Ruth desired nothing so much as to be left alone.

"Tell papa that I am coming," she said, going to the door to intercept Sally's entrance, and then returning to hang about Ruth once more.

"Dear Ruth! I could not guess that you cared so much. I will never mention Mr. Clinton's name again, for fear of vexing you, and I shall insist on papa's leaving him to go his own way. Will you forgive me then?"

Ruth replied with a kiss, since she could not find voice to speak, for she was touched by her words, without, however, attaching much weight to them. But for once in her life Clara was in earnest, and though she found Sir John impressed with a moral sense of the duty of bringing Jasper to justice, she did not rest until he had acceded to her wishes. Late in the evening of that long, dreary day, Ruth received the following note:—

"MY DEAREST RUTH, — The bearer of this note carries also a missive to Mr. Dunn, desiring him to set no detectives on Mr. Clinton's track, and refusing to prosecute if he is found. I hope that you are satisfied.

"Your most affectionate

"CLARA."

Ruth's reply was even more brief: —

"DEAR CLARA, — Thanks for what you have done.

"Yours ever,

"R. L."

Her thanks were heartfelt; for, notwithstanding what she had said to Isabel, there was indeed relief in laying her aching head on the pillow without feeling that she might raise it to hear that Jasper had been apprehended and brought back as a spectacle for the curiosity and pitying contempt of his former associates in Holmdale. Unquestionably Sir John's lenity was the cause of a certain degree of disappointment, and the little world considered itself defrauded of its just share of excitement and virtuous indignation. But Sir John himself, when once he had yielded to Clara's wishes, coinciding as they did with his naturally easy temper, could not be induced to alter his decision, although Mr. Dunn urged stringent measures as a satisfaction to himself.

Clara also fulfilled her other engagement, to make no further allusion to Jasper Clinton; and such unusual forbearance gave her an additional claim to Ruth's gratitude, and enabled her to endure attentions which were in themselves rather oppressive. Clara wasted much importunity in trying to prevail on her to make a visit of some days at Dyne Court, in order to divert her mind.

"Lord Edward is surely staid and sensible enough to suit you, and I am quite ready to make him over to you. And there are several other people in the house, and so much music and pleasant talk going on, that I am sure you would be amused."

Ruth felt as if she should never be amused more. By the end of the third day the interest in Jasper's mysterious disappearance had in great measure subsided, the eager speculation concerning his fate was over, and his name was seldom spoken. But in Ruth's breast the gnawing sense of care was more keenly felt, the suspense and miserable uncertainty was more intolerable. It almost seemed as if Jasper had been gone for years

instead of days, when the tidings which she had ceased to expect at last arrived.

As usual, when the postman's knock was succeeded by Sally's entrance, Isabel sprang forward to claim the letter, with the conviction that it must come from David.

"It is for you, Ruth," she said, in a tone of disappointment, quickly changed into joyful recognition. "Oh, Ruth! I think, I am certain that it is from Jasper."

The characters in which the address was traced seemed to dance before Ruth's eyes even when she had steadied her trembling hand; the lines themselves were straggling and uneven, but so few that they could not, under all these difficulties, take long to read.

"I know not why I write, since I may tell nothing which you do not already know — that dishonour is now not merely my inheritance but my own allotted portion, and that I am faint-hearted enough to shrink from the infamy I have incurred. Some such end I ever foresaw; but it is not therefore the more tolerable, and you know that the bitterness is increased tenfold by the knowledge that *she* will be taught to associate my name with disgrace and the basest ingratitude. My only hope is, that she may soon forget that she ever knew me, as you, Ruth, must also forget.

"God bless you, dear Ruth.

"J. C."

"Look there," said Ruth, pointing to the concluding words; "could he have written those words if he were not guiltless?"

"But is there no explanation?" Isabel asked. "Does he not say why he went, nor where he is going?"

It had not before occurred to Ruth that such information was wanting, but she found, on referring to the envelope, that it bore the Liverpool postmark. "He must," she said, faintly, "be going out of England — to America or elsewhere; indeed, he implies that we shall never see him more." Then she added, with something of wounded feeling, as she saw that Isabel still

looked dissatisfied. "Trust me, Isabel, if you will not tell me, I do not show you the letter, because I believe that it is meant only for myself. I shall not show it even to mamma, unless she desires it."

Mrs. Lennox forbore to desire anything which deepened the sadness on a face already too sad to be seen without pain, but she was in truth as little satisfied as Isabel with Ruth's reserve, believing that Jasper had made some admission which shook her former confidence in his innocence. But her trust was in reality as fully given as before, and her reluctance to show the letter arose from the allusion which it contained to his love for Clara Gascoigne; that love which would now appear more visionary and presumptuous than ever. She might well suppose that these words were meant to meet no eyes but hers, and she was unconscious how far her secret inclinations coincided with his wishes.

Sally's discretion was less remarkable than that of Jasper's former attendant Martha; and it was not long before surmises of the truth, founded on Isabel's unguarded expression, found their way into Mrs. Dunn's nursery, and from thence to the lady herself. In a flutter of excitement Mrs. Dunn informed her husband, on his return from the office, that "the Lennoxes had had a letter from young Clinton, and they must intend to keep it very close, for the Doctor, who was here to-day, certainly knew nothing of it."

Mr. Dunn sifted the story with his habitual caution; and as its authority appeared to be tolerably good, he decided on going to the Red House himself. "For my own satisfaction," he said, "I am resolved to go to the bottom of the matter."

Ruth instinctively knew on what errand he was come when he was ushered into her mother's dressing-room, and she continued to ply her needle without raising her eyes to return his greeting. She was not long left in suspense, for Mr. Dunn's first words were addressed to herself. "I have taken the liberty of calling," he said, "on account of the report which reached me, that you have heard of, or from, Jasper Clinton. May I ask if it is true?"

ot tr "It is true," said Ruth.

"And I presume that he attempts some explanation of his inexplicable conduct."

With an expression of scorn, more often seen on Isabel's lip than on her sister's, Ruth replied: "He says nothing which would, I believe, be considered satisfactory by you."

Mr. Dunn was not deficient in the assurance and pertinacity so essential to success in the legal profession, and he rejoined with perfect coolness, "Perhaps, Miss Lennox, you will allow me to judge for myself. If you show me the letter, I will engage that it shall go no farther."

Ruth turned her imploring eyes on her mother, but Mrs. Lennox only looked distressed, and doubtful how to act. Isabel, however, said bluntly, "I don't know why you should see Ruth's letter, Mr. Dunn, since Sir John does not intend to prosecute Jasper."

"You will allow, however," replied Mr. Dunn, "that I have a personal interest in the matter, as I was in some sense responsible for the loss. And since Sir John's leniency has secured Clinton from any evil consequences, surely Miss Lennox will not refuse me the opportunity of clearing myself."

"Among all the versions of the story which go abroad," said Mrs. Lennox, "there is none which casts the slightest reflection upon you."

"Not at present, perhaps; but the story may be cast up against me at some future time, unless I have the means of vindicating myself."

No one answered, and it did not seem that Ruth was disposed to make any sacrifice to avert this possible hazard of Mr. Dunn's reputation. He was resolved, however, to make another effort. "For your own sake, Miss Lennox, I think you must admit the impropriety of withholding the knowledge you possess of such a questionable affair."

This argument had its effect on Mrs. Lennox, who said, after a moment's hesitation, "My dear Ruth, will it not be well to let Mr. Dunn see the letter, since he has engaged that it shall be safe with him?"

"It will be safer here," said Ruth, vehemently, while she drew out the letter and threw it on the small bright fire which the chilliness of the evening had rendered necessary. It was soon consumed, but not before Ruth had repented of the hasty impulse to which she had yielded. She felt that she had done her utmost to frustrate the last hope of clearing Jasper's name. Her mother was grieved; Mr. Dunn seriously offended; and, above all, there was the bitter consciousness that those parting words, so unspeakably precious to her, were now crumbled to ashes. She burst into tears, and quickly left the room.

Very stiffly Mr. Dunn arose, and wished Mrs. Lennox good evening, and returned to detail all the circumstances to his wife. He summed up the whole with the remark, that the affair was extremely discreditable to Miss Lennox. Of course it was evident that Clinton had not a single extenuating circumstance to mention, or she would have been ready enough to bring it forward.

Mrs. Dunn fully assented, and she also ascertained that her intimate friend Mrs. Smith was of the same opinion. The two ladies agreed that there could be but one motive for Ruth's conduct.

"Though how," Mrs. Smith added, "a sensible girl, as Ruth Lennox always appeared to be, could fall in love with that grave, heavy young man, one can hardly conceive. He had a bad countenance and no manner; and Ruth has had so many advantages in her intimacy with Miss Gascoigne, that she ought to have known better."

Such remarks could not circulate through Holmdale without coming to the knowledge of the Lennoxes; but Isabel and her mother were more affected by them than Ruth herself. Passive, patient, and indifferent, the shadow lay too heavily on her spirit to be either deepened or disturbed by such passing breezes.

There was one, however, who did not submit so patiently to such insinuations. Placid as his temper was on all other occasions, Dr. Berkeley resented any aspersion on Ruth or discussion of her sentiments with indignant quickness; and when it was discovered that the Doctor was "rather touchy" on the

subject, it was avoided in his presence. His opinion, however, had a certain weight; and some began to admit that Ruth's determination to stand by Jasper was natural at least, if not quite justifiable, and that it might possibly arise from no deeper feeling than their youthful friendship.

"Or, if she has been in love," Miss Perrott said, plaintively, "so other people have been before, and yet they get over it and become sensible women after all."

As most of these differing opinions found their way to the Red House, Isabel chafed and fretted, protesting that she would never speak to Mrs. Dunn again; and she asked Ruth whether she would not now admit that her dear friends in Holmdale were far from perfection. But Ruth answered with a grave smile that, if there was any change, it was in themselves rather than in others; and Mrs. Dunn's visits were returned as regularly as they had ever been.

CHAPTER XV.

A tranquil spirit, as of one
Who now in happy languor rests,
Sore-wearied with his work well done,
But through well-doing richly blest;
A spirit, as of one who broods
On sorrows past, but unforget,
Whose heart, like heaven, the rainiest moods
Leave softer, and without a blot.

LENNOX.

"AND now, Isabel, tell me all about everything."

It was David Lennox who made this comprehensive request, on the day of his return to Holmdale after four years' absence. They sat together in the garden, Isabel clinging to her brother's side, as if unable to convince herself of the reality of her happiness, her eyes glittering, her cheeks flushing with proud pleasure.

"Oh, David! how *very* glad I am to have you once more."

"*Cela va sans dire*. I am glad too, yet it is not all pleasure. You had not prepared me, Isabel, for the change in my mother."

"Perhaps I do not see it as you do. It has been gradual; and then any little thing upsets her, and your coming is *not* a little thing, so no wonder she looks nervous and shaken."

"And, Ruth!" continued David. "It gave me a shock to reflect that there is little more than a year between us — she looks positively old and faded."

"Ah, Ruth *is* changed," said Isabel, sadly, while she looked up to the window, which was carefully closed, and darkened with jealousies; "but can you wonder, when even a plant is blanched and sickly which does not taste fresh air nor see the glorious sunshine? Ruth sits always in that close, dark room, and her nights too are broken."

"I remember," said David, "you wrote that mamma did not care to have any one about her but Ruth."

"No," said Isabel, the tears rising in her eyes; "it is not that Ruth keeps me away, for she knows how I long to be of use; but it tires mamma to have more than one person in the room, and I think she has forgotten how old I am now — really quite grown up, and able to do many things for her, if she would let me try."

"You may well say that you have grown old, and I am not sure if that is not the most lamentable transformation of all," said David, regarding his sister, however, with anything but dissatisfaction. "With your hat tied so decorously under your chin, and your brown-holland dress without a soil or tumble, no one would suppose that you had ever run wild. You have positively become a young lady."

"Not before it was time, David, unless I preferred skipping the intermediate stage, and landing in middle age. You know I was twenty last June. But how long you must have lived in barracks, not to know *batiste* from brown holland — my very best summer guise, which I put on on purpose to do you honour."

"And your gloves upon your hands," said David, continuing his inspection; "how that reform would have rejoiced Jasper!"

"Yes; what a tribulation my dress was to Jasper, and how often he admonished me not to throw on my things headlong! And he was still living among us when you were last here,

David. I know how Ruth must be reminded of him in seeing you again."

"What were really her relations with Jasper? Through Gascoigne I hear more of the Holmdale gossip than you deign to impart; and from something which the little heiress said or wrote to him, he gathered that Ruth was still wearing the willow on Clinton's account."

"That is one of Clara's inconsequent stories," said Isabel, indignantly; "she knows very well that, if Jasper was in love with any one, it was with herself."

"Clinton in love with Miss Gascoigne!" repeated David, with an incredulous whistle; "that is rather preposterous. And it was a singular proof of attachment to abscond with her father's money."

"Oh, David, you must not say that — at least not before Ruth; for she does not believe it yet."

"Then what does she think has become of him?"

"I cannot tell. Since she received that letter from him she has scarcely mentioned his name; but I know quite well that he is not forgotten, and she seems to have some vague hope of his return. You know the window of her room is in the opposite angle to mine, and I have often seen her open the shutter to look up and down the street, and then draw back with such a face of wistful sadness, as if it were quite a fresh disappointment."

"Which, you must allow me to remark, Isabel, bears out Clara's romance, rather than yours. I am sorry for Ruth, and for Clinton also, be he an honest man or a thief; for he was certainly a very good fellow. I drove through Bean-street on my way here, and I see the old house is to let."

"Yes; it has been uninhabited since Martha gave it up two years ago. She quarrelled with her lodgers, and railed at the Holmdale people generally, until at last she gave up the place altogether, declaring it was too wicked to live in."

"Shook off the dust of her feet and departed. Now, Isabel, don't look shocked at that small levity. I am afraid that Ruth has made you as puritanical as herself."

"I wish she had, but I shall never be as good as Ruth. Not that I allow that she is puritanical, for the more severe she is on herself, the greater allowance she makes for others. She never seems to have a will of her own, or a wish to look beyond the day's work before her."

"And you are not so contented? Certainly your life must be sufficiently lonely and monotonous, if Ruth is so much with my mother."

"It is wrong to say so; I should not say it to any one but you," answered Isabel, "and really there is much that is pleasant. We have the run of the Dyne Court library, and then I am never tired of gardening, and you will have to confess, Mr. Lennox, that the borders of scarlet geranium at Dyne Court are not half so gorgeous as mine. But sometimes I have a foolish craving for something less trivial and limited than the tone of Holmdale society, and I should like to have a peep into the gay world of which Clara talks so much, if I were sure that it would not make me frivolous."

"Poor Isabel!" said David, pulling back her curls that he might see her glowing cheek, the action pleasantly recalling bygone days; "what a humiliating confession! We will go and see the gay world represented at Dyne Court, that is, if we are ever asked."

"We have been asked often enough hitherto. Clara is still constant to her first fancy to Ruth, and is always pressing her to come; but she cannot leave mamma, and they don't like me to go alone. I fancy that there are strange doings when the house is full, for the last semblance of restraint departed with Madame La Rue, and Clara has it all her own way."

"Gascoigne says," replied David, "that his cousin is the greatest coquette of his acquaintance, and as he is himself in great request in ladies' society, I imagine that he has some experience of the species. I suppose that she might have married three or four times over, if she had chosen."

"I suppose so. At the end of every season they come down here with a fresh train. Lord Edward Lynmere is the only re-

maining one of the original set — the Forlorn Hope, as she calls him — and she uses him rather better than any of the others, although without caring for him in the least."

"I should think," said David, "that such proceedings must outrage Sir John's views of propriety."

"Very possibly. She sometimes complains that papa has been dreadfully savage; which means, I imagine, that he has administered a lecture, only with the effect of making her more wilful than before. Her power over him is as absolute as over every one else, and I don't wonder at it, for she is certainly very attractive, and so pretty. She looks as young and fresh as she did at that Christmas party, years ago."

"So Gascoigne told me; adding, that there was no recipe for wearing well so effectual as that of having no heart. I rather think he acts on that principle himself."

"Why, David, I fancied Captain Gascoigne was your best friend, and I was so glad to hear of his coming to Dyne Court this week. I have a pleasant recollection of his good-nature to me at that same Christmas party."

"He is pleasant enough," said David; "quite the pleasantest man in the regiment, and I like him very much. But I don't know that I wish *you* to like him. Tell me about the Doctor: does he haunt the house as much as ever?"

"The Doctor is flourishing," replied Isabel; "an argument against that heartless theory, for I am sure that he is large-hearted enough, and he is really quite *rajeuni*, or else I have grown up to him. He is more spruce in his dress, and his hair is not so ragged, and no greyer than when we first knew him. But there is one ominous sign of advancing years, and that is his touchiness when I assume that he is in the last stage of decrepitude; he takes infinite pains to prove that forty-two is no such unparalleled age; in which, I dare say, he is right."

"A candid admission," said David, laughing, "from which I infer that you and the Doctor fence as much as ever."

"No, indeed, David. I have grown too old to be saucy, and so we are amicable, and rather appallingly sensible. He has transferred all his attentions to me, for he and Ruth are not

the friends they were. She resented, or he fancied she resented, his lukewarmness in Jasper's cause, when Holmdale uplifted its voice against him. 'But what could I say,' the Doctor asked, pitiously, 'when I had no means of disproving the accusations, and scarcely knew how to disbelieve them?' And, though his impression of Ruth's coolness is in great measure imaginary, there is certainly a constraint between them."

"You must tell me no more about Ruth," said David, "for every fresh disclosure is more alarming than the last. Where does she mean to end, if even the Doctor is too secular for her?"

"Oh David, you misunderstand me. Indeed, we had better not talk of Ruth until you have learnt to think of her as she deserves."

David was amused by her tone of tremulous earnestness, and not remorseful for the emotion he had aroused, since he had no desire to forego a brother's privilege of teasing. Yet he felt guilty when, before the smile had passed from his lips, Ruth herself came along the gravel walk to join them. As David had hinted, her air was not consistent with her real age, for, although she might only count twenty-three summers, all youthful roundness of outline had departed from form and feature, her cheek was wan and faded, and the lassitude of her movements contrasted sadly with Isabel's elastic step, as she bounded towards her.

"Oh Ruth! I am so glad that you have come out. I began to be afraid that you meant to sit at home all the afternoon, and it is so pleasant here — really quite hot."

"Quite hot!" repeated David. "What would you say if we had you on the Rock? I have had secret longings for a great-coat."

"No, really! are you chilly? I will fetch you two or three great-coats in a minute; or we can go in and light a fire. I quite forgot your tropical habits."

"Considering that I have never been south of Malta, it is creditable to your geographical knowledge to remember them now," said David; and Ruth laughed a pleasant laugh, which showed that she could still afford to be light-hearted.

"It is not my fault, David, nor yet Miss Lawly's, that

Isabel's education was so neglected. Indeed, I think that Miss Lawly had abdicated before you left Holmdale, because Isabel was so determined to be a self-taught genius, that she never would learn anything in a legitimate way."

"You prosaic people!" retorted Isabel; "if you had any imagination, you would know that I only wished you to infer that the sun beats upon the Rock with almost tropical fervour, and that the people are indolent and chilly. I believe that I know more of Gibraltar than either of you, for I have read up the subject ever since the regiment was quartered there. And now do tell me, David, which coat you would like."

"No, I shall not," said David, composedly. "I may have the tropical failings of being indolent and chilly; and in a day or two I suppose we shall fall into our old relations, but as yet I am not disposed to send you on my errands. Besides, I shall be able to endure the severity of the climate for another half-hour, if you will let me have the sunny end of the bench."

The change was effected, and the half-hour passed pleasantly in that desultory talk, glancing on every subject and exhausting none, which a family re-union involves. But when the shadow of the wall overspread the last strip of chequered sunshine, Ruth insisted that they should go home, since any chill might bring on a return of the Rock fever which had obliged David to apply for sick-leave. "And besides," the invariable conclusion of her brief holiday-making — "and besides, mamma must be wondering what has become of me."

"You are right, Isabel," said David, as they sauntered more leisurely after her along the path. "Ruth has lost nothing but her good looks. She is not alarmingly virtuous, and she laughs at my wit, and tolerates my levity more readily than in days of yore."

Ruth returned to her mother's room. The atmosphere, close and sickly as Isabel had described it to be, seemed more oppressive after the freshness of the outer air, and eyes less accustomed to the obscure half-light would have found it difficult to discern the objects in the room; but she made her way with ease to her

mother's sofa, and said presently, as she caressed her feverish and wasted hand, "You look so tired, *madre mia*."

"Yes, I am tired," said Mrs. Lennox; and in her voice there was the plaintive and almost querulous note which betrays sleeplessness and wearing pain. "David's voice was too much for me, though I did not like to vex him, poor boy, by asking him to speak lower."

"He has not quite learned to modulate his voice to suit a sick room," said Ruth; "but still it has a pleasant tone. And his laugh, mamma — he did not laugh here for fear of tiring you, but it is quite as joyous as ever."

"Yes; it is his old laugh — I heard him below the windows. And so you don't think him changed; Ruth."

"Not spoiled, mamma, in the very least. He is so full of home-feelings, very frank in telling of his doings, and he and Isabel are as devoted to each other as ever. I was afraid that Isabel's anticipations were too great to be realized, but she is overflowing with happiness."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mrs. Lennox, "and you ought to be with them, Ruth, instead of moping here."

"I am not moping, mamma," said Ruth, a little wounded by her words, and then detecting the *arrière pensée*; "I thought you might like to hear David's news at second-hand, but perhaps even my voice tires you."

"Not your voice, Ruth; but my hearing is so painfully alive to-day, that any little thing tires me, and the click of your knitting-pins is such an irritating noise, and I know you don't like to be idle."

At other times Mrs. Lennox had found pleasure in watching the movement of Ruth's deft fingers, so this source of annoyance was involuntary; but Ruth was remorseful, and laid her occupation aside, declaring that she was glad of an excuse for idleness.

Mrs. Lennox was soon so interested by her report of David's talk that she was not at liberty to obey the summons to tea until her brother and sister had finished their meal, and had sauntered out again to enjoy the sweet summer twilight. The

tea was cold, and the aspect of the deserted table calculated to offend an uncertain appetite, so her cup was soon pushed aside, and she crept into a corner of the sofa, where, with the consciousness of being unobserved, came the expression of wistful sadness, in which the lines of her face so readily settled. She might chide her rebellious heart for the flood of recollections awakened by David's return, for the pining desire to see once more the form and features which were almost as familiar as those of her brother, and ever associated in her memory of their boyish days; she might reproach herself for such repinings at a time when she ought only to have been glad and grateful, but still her thoughts went and came, and she was weary, too weary to resist them.

Where was Jasper now? — homeless, friendless, perhaps not only in want of all which makes life lovely, but of its common necessities; his footsteps, wherever they might lead him, still tracked by a sense of dishonour and a morbid fear of detection. On one contingency Ruth refused to dwell. She would not suppose that the disgrace was merited, either by his past or present conduct, for her belief in his innocence was cherished as trustfully as ever. "And wherever he may be," she thought, "he is, and will always be, in His hand — whether still a wanderer and an outcast here, or, if his day of trial is ended, and he is gone where no harm can touch him, and the strife of tongues not come nigh to vex him. If he were still alive, we should surely in all these years have had some communication." And in thus admitting the possibility of his death, there was less bitterness than in the thoughts which had gone before.

By such musings Ruth's brief intervals of solitude and repose were generally occupied. When the strain of continual watchfulness involved in her attendance on her mother was relaxed, she had not energy to prevent their recurrence, though well aware that they were neither wise nor salutary. What wonder that her cheek was pallid, her eye heavy, her form drooping? — so that when David and Isabel re-entered, their bright young faces, glowing with health and animation, might almost seem to deny any kindred between them.

CHAPTER XVI.

Love wakes men, once a life-time each;
 They lift their heavy lids and look;
 And, lo! what one sweet page can teach
 They read with joy, then shut the book;
 And some give thanks, and some blaspheme,
 And most forget.

The Angel in the House.

"Remember, Evelyn," said Clara Gascoigne, on the following morning, as she left her cousin still lingering over his late breakfast; "remember that you must not be beguiled into farming with papa, nor walking with Lord Edward, for I shall want you to ride with me to Holmdale."

"Of course, — to captivate young Lennox," said Captain Gascoigne, with a smile of slight sarcasm.

Clara's colour was a little heightened, but she disdained to notice the imputation, only saying, as she reached the door, "Do you intend to go with me or not? for I can ask Lord Edward to be my squire."

"I am quite at your service, Cousin Clara," said Evelyn; and so it was settled. Lord Edward would willingly have gone on hers, but Clara did not accede to the proposal. She said that she did not like to ride in a cavalcade; and the two cousins set out only attended by the old groom, who acted chaperon on these occasions.

Sally informed Miss Gascoigne that the young ladies, or at least Miss Isabel, were in the garden, and springing from her horse, Clara led the way there. "Prepare to be charmed," she said, lightly; "Isabel may rival any of your Spanish beauties, for she is, in her own style, one of the handsomest people I know."

As she spoke, the brother and sister unexpectedly emerged from one of the grass alleys, and she was so much struck by David's appearance that she omitted to mark, as she had intended, the impression made by Isabel on her cousin. It was

true that David possessed no common share of manly beauty, nor was it wholly due to his fine expression and perfect regularity of feature; he was scarcely above the middle height, but slim, graceful, and alert, and there was something singularly striking in his noble and spirited bearing. Under these circumstances it was difficult to escape the imputation of coxcombry; and though nothing could appear more unstudied than his dark shooting suit, just relieved by the loosely-knotted blue neckerchief, and a riband of the same shade round his straw hat, it was certain that no dress became him better; and perhaps he knew it.

No one might say the same of Isabel. With an air of proud, shrinking bashfulness which betrayed how far she was from wishing to court observation, she drew closer to her brother's side; and when Captain Gascoigne addressed her, her cheeks were mantled with a richer glow, nor could he win more than a hurried, side-long glance of those eyes whose singular beauty he had not forgotten.

Of Captain Gascoigne's appearance no account has been given, and he was one of those persons most easily described by negatives. He was neither dark nor fair, neither tall nor short, not well-looking, nor the reverse; his features were so little distinctive that no two persons who had passed half an hour in his company would agree in their account of the colour of his eyes or hair, the shape of his nose, or the height of his person, though generally unanimous in acknowledging his social qualities.

Isabel did not feel inclined to dissent from this opinion; his manners were remarkable for ease and self-possession, tempered by the most polished courtesy, which only high breeding can give, and in which the society of Holmdale was necessarily deficient. But she was mortified that its effect should only be to make her manner more constrained; her answers would not flow, and she did not like to be deprived of such protection as David's presence afforded. He was detached from her side by Clara, who inveighed against the Lennox fashion of pacing the gravel walks, and incited David to flit with her among the

flower beds, accepting or rejecting his proffered flowers with careless coquetry.

"I hope," said Captain Gascoigne, as his eyes followed the other two, "that you don't think we have spoiled Lennox."

"Oh no," said Isabel, with a glow of pleasure, for the tone of the inquiry satisfied her that Evelyn did not think so himself.

"He seems very glad to be at home," resumed Captain Gascoigne; and this time Isabel answered, "Oh yea."

Perhaps Clara discovered that the acquaintance was not advancing at a rapid pace, for she good-naturedly came to the rescue with an inquiry after Ruth. "It is of no use asking *where* she is — behind that green jalousie, of course. Do you think that it would be of any use to send up a message that a person wishes to speak to her on business?"

"You have cried 'wolf' too often," said Isabel; "Ruth never receives such a message now, without cautiously inquiring whether it is Miss Gascoigne."

"But I do really want to see her on business — to sanction my carrying you off, Isabel, for a three days' visit next week. Mr. Lennox gives his consent, and engages to watch over your principles and manners, which I know Ruth expects me to corrupt. Do you think it will be permitted?"

"I will ask mamma, and let you know," said Isabel.

"I shall think Mr. Lennox a most faint-hearted brother if he does not carry the point; and I warn him that he will be very ill received if he comes alone."

"I will take care," said David, not looking much alarmed by the threat.

"I hope that the visit is fixed for the beginning of the week," said Evelyn; "my family, most unreasonably, require me to join them at Scarborough without delay."

"Are you going so soon, Gascoigne?" said David. "I understood that you were to pass your leave here."

"So he will," rejoined Clara; "the Captain likes to magnify his importance by threatening to withdraw his august presence;

but we all know that he is not likely to take his departure at the beginning of the shooting season, in order to become a marine animal at Scarborough."

"I confess that it is not an attractive picture," said Evelyn. "Miss Lennox looks as if she thought me wholly destitute of natural affection, so I must explain that I passed three days with my mother and sisters in town."

"Three nights, rather," said Clara; "for all day you were in Belgrave-square, or riding with me in Rotten-row."

"Because I was only in the way at home. The house was *bouleversé*, in consequence of the impending move to Scarborough, and there was not a chair to sit down upon, nor a meal fit to eat."

Isabel would have thought such sentiments heartless from the lips of another; but, perhaps, her perceptions were blunted by the easy indifference with which they were spoken. It was evident that Captain Gascoigne liked to make himself out worse than he really was; and besides, his connexion with Dyne Court had always appeared more close than that with his own family, since he, as heir to the baronetcy, was Sir John's especial charge.

"You will come then," said Clara, as David placed her on her horse; "and bring Isabel. Tell Ruth there is no very alarming dissipation."

"We shall not fail," replied David; adding, as soon as the cousins had ridden off, "you could not see the world under better auspices, Isabel."

"I thought you would admire her," said Isabel, ashamed of an indefinite dissatisfaction in finding her anticipations fulfilled.

"Who could not help it? I never saw more perfect grace; and, without meaning any disrespect to you, I have lived too long among olive complexions not to appreciate her delicate fairness —

'Quel colore,

Che non è pallidezza, ma candore.'"

"Oh, David! do you still keep up your Italian?"

"Not I. That quotation is a vestige of our old readings of the *Gerusalemme*. But don't go off into a literary discussion, for I have not half done with Miss Gascoigne." There was a moment's hesitation in pronouncing her name. Formerly he had called her Clara, but now that he had seen her, he felt that it was too great a liberty.

"It was only a digression. Go on," said Isabel.

"You have interrupted the chain of my ideas. I don't know that I was going to say anything more important than to remark on her sunny hair, and on the sunshine there is about her altogether."

"So there is," said Isabel. "She is one of those who 'smiling live, and call life pleasure.'"

"And what do you call it, may I inquire?" said David, amused, as well as surprised by her thoughtful tone.

"I don't know; I have not made up my mind. Ruth has found life 'a business, not good cheer.'"

"Ah, Ruth — but I hope that we need not all make such woful discoveries. And that reminds me, Isabel; that Ruth positively must not spend this fine afternoon in the house. I shall go and offer to take her place for an hour."

Isabel shook her head doubtfully; but she was not sorry that another should make the attempt in which she had been so often baffled, and she only warned David to go up stairs quietly, since this was her mother's most languid hour of the day. In compliance with the hint, he broke off the tune he was whistling when he reached the first floor, little dreaming that no sound had escaped his mother's nervously acute hearing from the time he slammed the house door, and began to ascend the creaking old stair, taking two steps at a time. Ruth was reading aloud, in the low, well-modulated tone which had soothed many an hour of pain and weariness; and Mrs. Lennox looked up, discomposed, though not displeased, by the interruption.

"Well, David, have you come in from your walk?"

"No, mother. We have not been farther than the garden,

but there is time enough yet; and while it is so fine, I want to send Ruth out for a turn, and sit with you."

"Mamma will be more fit for a talk after tea; that is her best time," said Ruth.

"This is the best time for a walk," said David, mischievously. "Now, Ruth, let me play nurse for once. You shall see how well I can do it."

It was injudicious to carry on the discussion before Mrs. Lennox, who looked nervous and uncomfortable; and David did not mend his cause by an unlucky stumble over a stool which stood in a dark corner by the fender, sending down the fire-irons with an outrageous clatter.

"It is very good of you to think of me," said Mrs. Lennox; "and, as you say, Ruth ought not to lose the fine afternoon. I do not mind being alone."

"But, mamma," said Ruth, "I would rather finish our reading first."

"And you will not let me finish it for you," said David.

"Not to-day," replied Mrs. Lennox. "My head is so weak that I could not bear a strange voice. You are quite right to think of Ruth, who ought to spare herself much more than she does; and it is my own fault, for my long illness has made me selfish and inconsiderate."

"Oh, mamma!" said Ruth, pleadingly, "why will you say such things, when you know that it is my great happiness to be with you?"

"So great, that you will allow no one else to share it," said David, provoked with himself as soon as the words had passed his lips. He felt the injustice of the retort, and he had discomposed both Ruth and his mother with no good result.

Mrs. Lennox repeated that she should not at all mind being left alone, adding —

"If I take a good rest now, I shall be able to enjoy David's visit in the evening, and I am sure that I can bear no more reading now."

"Then you will let me sit by you and be quiet," said Ruth. "I really would rather go out later; and David ought to go and

call on the Doctor, who must be longing to see him, and only refrained from calling lest he should be in the way."

David acquiesced, and he left Mrs. Lennox remorseful for her exacting habits, while Ruth tormented herself with trying to ascertain the truth of his accusation, quite ready to believe that her love for her mother was too encroaching and made her unmindful of others. And yet she could not love her less, nor desist from those gentle offices on which Mrs. Lennox was so dependent.

After all, Ruth might have spared herself as much of her distress as was due to the consciousness of having vexed David, for the cloud had vanished from his open brow before he reached the foot of the stairs.

"It will not act," he said to Isabel; "I only make matters worse by meddling. And since Ruth will not follow my advice, I must follow hers, and go and call on the Doctor."

"I will go with you," said Isabel; "I would not miss the first interview on any account."

"I suppose there is no harm," said David; and Isabel laughed merrily at his scruples.

"You very absurd person! As if there *could* be any harm in visiting the Doctor, who has been grandfather to the family from the time we could run alone."

Not unwilling to be convinced, David offered his arm, and they walked down the High-street together, Isabel's smile of proud affection betraying her conviction that all who saw must envy her the possession of such a brother. The cricket-ground attached to the school awakened some sage reflections on the lapse of time, for boys were playing as zealously, and sisters looking on with as eager an interest, as in the days when David and Isabel there bore a part. The low irregular building which formed the master's house also reminded David of many a scurry along the gravel-walk, with the theme or copy of verses which ought to have been presented in the study ten minutes before. And when the old housekeeper opened the door — in the identical cap, as David whispered, which she had worn in 'ays of yore — her features relaxed into a grim smile of

recognition, although she seemed doubtful whether "Master Lennox" had outgrown the age when he, in common with the rest of his species, must be regarded as the natural enemy of herself and her master, and she was disposed to resist any invasion of the study. David, however, knew his way along the dark passage too well to wait for an introduction, and he led the way for Isabel, scarcely waiting for an answer to his knock, before he opened the door.

"Come in," said Dr. Berkeley, without looking up from his desk, and expecting some application in the approved school-boy formula, — "Oh, if you please, sir!" — so that he was unprepared for Isabel's joyous greeting.

"Now, Dr. Berkeley, do you see what I have brought?"

"Miss Isabel!" the Doctor said; adding, after only a moment's perplexity, "Is it David? my dear boy, how you have grown!"

"Yes; does he not look well?" said Isabel, hovering round him, as if beginning her inspection for the first time; "we feel quite hurt that you never came to see him."

"And Ruth thought you might be modest, so she sent us here," added David.

"It was very kind of her, and of you. And now, Miss Isabel, do take my chair;" for the Doctor awoke to the discovery that his accommodation for visitors was limited, and it was more easy to relinquish his own seat than to disengage any other from the books with which they were piled. But Isabel refused the post of dignity, and drew out a small stool which had been the joint present of Ruth and herself, an early essay in tapestry work; David made himself quite at home on a corner of the table; and the Doctor resumed his seat, and composed himself for a talk. One of his first inquiries was whether David found many changes in the place.

"Fewer in this room than elsewhere," he replied; "I could almost fancy myself a boy again, and that I had come to hear your friendly criticisms on some copy for which I gained *κῶδος* in school."

"Ah!" said the Doctor, reproachfully; "I was thinking

this morning that, if you had gone on as you began, you would have got a first-class by this time, and been within sight of a fellowship."

"It is a sad falling off, indeed," said Isabel; "but his mind has not wholly run to waste. He can stand an examination in the Army List, calculate his chances of promotion, and explain the intricacies of a brevet. He has explained them to me twice this morning already, and I am sorry to say that I don't understand the matter any better than before."

"However, Miss Isabel," said the Doctor, "it will not do to set him against his profession, for I suppose it is too late to change."

"If I wished it," said David; "but I assure you I don't repent of my choice;" and Dr. Berkeley felt that, if he still cherished the unhappy delusion, there was no more to be said. He reverted to his former remark.

"From what you said just now, David, I conclude that you do find changes elsewhere?"

"At home, chiefly. You know that, when I was here last, my mother used to like to see people in her dressing-room, even when she was too unwell to come down stairs; but now she is scarcely equal to seeing me, and the house seems strange and unhomelike. And then there is Ruth."

"Yes, indeed!" said the Doctor, sighing; "all that is too sad to talk about."

"Then there is the break-up of the Bean-street *ménage*," continued David; "that has taken place since I went away, and one misses Jasper; otherwise Holmdale seems to go on much as it used to do. We met Miss Perrott and her standing complaint of rheumatism, and she does not look a day older. And I hear that you keep up a succession of Dunns not a whit more manageable than their senior."

"And without you and Clinton to keep them in order," said the Doctor; "but, perhaps, they may not turn out so ill after all, for one never can tell. You see how I have been disappointed in my two most promising pupils."

David laughed; but Isabel was more indignant than amused.

"Really, Dr. Berkeley, it is hardly fair to class David and Jasper together now."

"Your sister would think it fair, Miss Isabel."

"But I do not."

"Then I am sorry that I said anything to hurt you," answered the Doctor; and Isabel was mollified, and rather ashamed of her petulance.

"I am not hurt," observed David; "for Jasper's unhappy story can hardly appear more incomprehensible to Ruth than it does to me. I should have supposed that I was more likely to have run off with my neighbour's money myself, remembering his abhorrence of anything which bordered on shuffling; so that his code of honour was far higher than that of the school in general. He must have acted on some uncontrollable impulse, and it is enough to make one believe that vice is hereditary."

"There is no use talking of it," said the Doctor; and Isabel laughingly declared that, if so many subjects were barred, there would be nothing left to say. Conversation did not flag, however, and the Doctor was at last obliged to turn them out without ceremony, as they lingered beyond the hour for going into school. They set forth on a pleasant, sauntering walk along the river, returning rather late for tea, at which Ruth was waiting to preside; and while Isabel went to lay aside her bonnet, there was an opportunity for the desired explanation with David, of which Ruth availed herself.

"I know, David," she said, in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice, "that I am very dictatorial and disagreeable."

"Indeed! I am exceedingly sorry to hear it," said David, laughing. But Ruth was quite in earnest.

"And yet I hardly see how it is to be helped. It is partly because I began to manage things when I was too young, and now you see mamma has got used to my ways, and one does not like to do anything to vex her."

"As I did just now," said David.

"I did not mean that. I was wondering how much was my fault, and if it is possible for you to be more with mamma, since you wish it."

"I do wish it, Ruth; but chiefly for your sake. I cannot wonder that mamma wishes to have you with her, but still you ought to spare yourself. Every one — even the Doctor, whose eyes are not of the brightest — remarks how ill and altered you look."

"Ah, that is nothing. I am really quite strong."

David could only shake his head incredulously, for Isabel and the urn came in together, and there the explanation ended — rather unsatisfactorily, as explanations are apt to do.

CHAPTER XVII.

Alas for pleasure on the sea,
And sorrow on the shore!
The smile that bleat one lover's heart
Has broken many more.

Hoon.

THE change which David proposed to make in his mother's habits and manner of life could not be put in practice at present, since his own time was fully occupied in receiving the visits of his acquaintance in Holmdale. He bore the infliction more good-humouredly than Isabel, who was intolerant of the reminiscences of various old ladies who had known him when he was no higher than the table, and now remarked in an audible aside that he was really a handsome youth. Captain Gascoigne's entrance drove away Miss Perrott, just as she was taking a fresh start on the subject of rheumatism, and David greeted him with animation, declaring that a cloth coat was a pleasant variety on the fifth barége shawl which he had had the honour of showing out that day.

"Yes, it is really too dreadful," ejaculated Isabel; "and I know that the United Service will next be upon us. I met him this morning, and he said that he should certainly call on Mr. David."

"However, I presume that the United Service, whoever he may be, does not wear a barége shawl," said Captain Gascoigne.

"No; but he is a greater bore than fifty old women," said David. "I tell you what, Gascoigne, I shall go out and smoke, and you can make your visit just as well by the river side."

"I was not going to inflict a visit upon you," replied Evelyn; "my cousin sent me to know if we might expect you on Monday."

"Oh yes; I believe Ruth has already written to say so. Now do, Gascoigne, come out before we are caught."

Captain Gascoigne still demurred, glancing at the broad-leaved hat upon the table, while Isabel wore her brown-holland jacket and rose-coloured neckerchief. "I must not," he said, "interfere with your sister's walk."

"Isabel may come too," said David, "without prejudice to the enjoyment of our cigar. She is too much of a *gitaña* to mind it."

"Then you must wait for Ruth," said Isabel; "she promised to walk with us this afternoon."

"We can wait for no one," replied David, starting up at the sound of the door-bell. "If you will follow with Ruth, you will find us by the willow." And he made a hasty exit by the window, followed by Captain Gascoigne, while Isabel ran out into the passage to instruct Sally that Mr. David had just gone out. She next went in search of Ruth, and they came down the path across the meadow before the gentlemen had made much progress in their cigars.

"So that is Captain Gascoigne," said Ruth, when near enough to distinguish his features. "I remember at that Christmas party thinking him rather well-looking."

With an unaccountable inclination to stand on the defensive, Isabel answered hurriedly, that she did not think him otherwise now.

"He is not remarkable either way," said Ruth; "and he certainly looks like a gentleman, which is all that signifies."

"Already!" Evelyn said to Isabel, after exchanging a more formal greeting with her sister. "What have you done with the United Service?"

"Oh," said Isabel, laughing and colouring, "he only asked for Mr. Lennox."

"And now," said David, "where are we to go? Will it be too far for Ruth if we take the footpath to Bruton's mill? I have a great desire to go nutting once more in the hazel copse."

"It will not be too far, will it, Ruth, if you take David's arm?—that is a great help," said Isabel; and with the proffered aid Ruth thought that she could accomplish the walk.

Isabel led the way with Captain Gascoigne; and Ruth was surprised, and not very well pleased to find one of whom they knew so little already admitted to habits of intimacy. And when, as was soon the case, her languid movements were outstripped by Isabel's brisk step, she ventured to impart some of her misgivings to David.

"I hope that you will take care of Isabel when you get to Dyne Court, David."

"Oh yes, of course. I see what you mean; but you need not be afraid of any intentions in that quarter. Gascoigne is not at all a marrying man."

"I should think," said Ruth, "that would be an additional reason for caution."

"Not at all," said David, for the instinct of opposition was awakened. "Surely two people may talk and laugh together, and no harm follow. Though, after all, if Gascoigne were to settle down as Benedict the married man, Isabel is just the one to attract him, for she has so much freshness and originality, to say nothing of her beauty. And she might do worse, for Gascoigne is a pleasant fellow, and his prospects are good enough, and his luck infallible, or he could never have got his company at six-and-twenty."

"Pleasantness, luck, and prosperity! so that is all you can say for your friend," said Ruth.

"My dear Ruth," answered David, impatiently, "when I conceive that there is any likelihood of his becoming my brother-in-law, it will be time enough to discuss his moral character. Considering that you assume to be a sensible and practical woman, I wonder that you allow your imagination to

run away with you so far as to compress a three-volume novel into a visit of as many days. Isabel is thinking as much of love as I am."

Could Isabel have guessed the subject of discussion between her brother and sister, it would have called an indignant colour to the cheek which now glowed with a blush of simple pleasure. It was difficult to withstand the influence of Captain Gascoigne's powers of conversation; and amid downcast looks, and shy retiring smiles, she betrayed some of the playful daring of her natural manner, venturing to rally his ignorance, when he confessed his inability to distinguish between Swedes and turnips.

"It is very disgraceful," he said, laughing; "and Sir John is mortified by the discovery that I have no agricultural tastes. But, perhaps, I may do better, if you will undertake my instruction."

"I know nothing of farming," said Isabel; "but one cannot walk through the fields without seeing things."

"I don't care about *things*. Human nature is a more amusing study."

"Oh, do you think so?"

"That question implies dissent, Miss Lennox."

"Certainly; I don't agree with you at all. In history and books people are all very well, but they are apt to be a disappointment in real life — tiresome and commonplace."

"Which turnips are not," said Evelyn; and Isabel was amused by the retort.

"I suppose that I am unlucky, and only fall in with the human turnips, — people who are more useful than ornamental."

"You must have been unlucky indeed," said Captain Gascoigne. "In my limited acquaintance with the society of Holmdale, I do not miss the element of beauty."

Isabel understood his meaning without taking offence, as for consistency's sake she ought to have done, since she had been wont to resent a compliment as a studied insult. But then she had never before been addressed with such graceful ease and readiness.

"Clara says, as you do, that there is more to admire and enjoy in a room full of people than in the most beautiful view."

"I do not say so, Miss Lennox. I prefer the view when I am allowed a companion to admire and enjoy it with me. Indeed, I can desire nothing pleasanter than the quiet, homelike beauty of such a walk as this."

"I am so glad you are worthy of it. Some people are quite ill-natured to our country; call it tame and uninteresting, and never learn to love it as I do. Now, can anything be prettier than that reach of the river shut in by the clump of trees?" In turning to point out the reach in question, Isabel first discovered how far they had outstripped their companions; and she said, with a heightened colour, and an accession of embarrassment —

"We have walked too fast for Ruth."

"We can wait till they come up; there is a good seat on the stile," said Captain Gascoigne; but Isabel preferred walking back to meet them; an elaborate piece of discretion for which David rewarded her by rallying such superfluous activity.

"But, as you have come back," he said, "Gascoigne may tell us who we are to meet at Dyne Court, and if there is any one we know."

"There is Raeburn — I remember he was at the famous Christmas party at which we first met; but you will not know him again, for he is transformed from a cub into a dashing young Guardsman, though I think I can detect the element of *cubbism* still. There are the two Courtowns, — the eldest is at Cambridge, a mathematical genius and rather a prig, but Gerry is as great a schoolboy as ever, though old enough to know better. And Lord Edward Lynmere, — I suppose you know him."

"Only by reputation. My sisters have met him."

"He is a good deal at Dyne Court, I fancy."

"Yes," Ruth answered; "he has paid a long visit every autumn for the last four years."

"Poor Lynmere," said Captain Gascoigne; "he does not consort much with the young set, but goes farming with Sir

John, and looks mightily bored by such agricultural proceedings. These are the present inmates; but there is a fresh arrival to-morrow, — Mr. and Lady Maria Wentworth, and a mother and daughter whose names I have forgotten."

"You had better stop there," said David, laughing; "Isabel looks as if her heart failed her at the prospect of encountering such a multitude."

"It is alarming," said Isabel. "Clara said that there would be hardly any one."

"At all events," said Evelyn, lightly, "the party will not consist entirely of strangers. My cousin," he added, turning to Ruth, "wished me to ask if it is quite impossible for you to be of the number?"

"Quite impossible, thank you," said Ruth, briefly, for she felt that Clara was too well acquainted with the nature of her home ties to render any explanation necessary.

For the rest of the walk the party kept together, and the talk lay chiefly between the two gentlemen. Isabel was happy and amused, and only disturbed by a misgiving that her satisfaction was not shared by Ruth. Even her smiles did not chase the expression of languid weariness from her face; and when they parted from Captain Gascoigne at the door of the Red House, and David asked if he was not a pleasant fellow, Ruth only said "Yes, very," and ran up stairs to see how her mother had fared during her unusually long absence.

It was a good day with Mrs. Lennox, and Dr. Berkeley had been admitted to the dressing-room, awaiting the return of the young people, since he had consented to stay to tea, in order to have a good talk with David. So Mrs. Lennox had not wanted society, and as soon as Ruth had told her news she sent her down stairs to entertain the Doctor.

Ruth instantly set to work to sew a trimming on a muslin skirt of Isabel's, with an apology for its dimensions, as not exactly suited to the drawing-room. "But if I don't work at it here," she said, "I shall never get it done, for the muslin makes such a crackling and rustling that I cannot take it into mamma's room."

"Ruth hears with mamma's ears," remarked David; "I don't hear a sound."

"Because you are a giant of strength, and your nerves are made of whipcord," said Isabel. "Next time I see Mr. Ball, I mean to remind him of his sinister predictions, founded on the fact of your having no stamina. I remember how the hard word puzzled me, and I went surreptitiously to look for it in Johnson, and was not much enlightened by finding that it was a botanical term."

"It is a very pretty trimming," said the Doctor, who had taken a seat near Ruth, and was watching her proceedings. "You will make quite a sensation, Miss Isabel."

"Entirely owing to Ruth's trimming," added David. "Observe how careful the Doctor is not to minister to your vanity."

"Isabel is more likely to make a sensation if she is not well dressed," said Ruth; there are to be all sorts of fine people there."

"Now, Ruth," said Isabel, imploringly; "don't talk as if you wished to withdraw your sanction from such dangerous dissipation. I do really mean to be discreet."

"I know you do," said Ruth, smiling; "and I am very glad there is to be a party, because you have always longed to see something of the great world."

"A curiosity which you don't share?" said the Doctor.

And Ruth answered briefly, "Not at all."

Isabel was never satisfied until she had dived into the meaning of her sister's half-sentences, although the process was often sufficiently laborious. "Do you mean, Ruth, that you don't care, or you don't think it right?"

"If I thought it wrong, Isabel, I should not be glad that you are going."

"But do you think it wrong for yourself?"

"I don't wish to go, that is all," said Ruth.

"A settler for you, Isabel," remarked her brother; and because Isabel looked vexed, Ruth attempted to explain her meaning.

"I mean that, from the little I have seen of fine people, I

doubt if I should ever feel at home with them. I don't find that I have much in common even with Clara, though we have known her so long, and I do really like her very much."

"For my part," said David, "I shall not complain if Miss Gascoigne's manners are a sample of what we are to find at Dyne Court."

"I was not thinking altogether of manner," said Ruth; "for in manner one hardly sees two people in the same set alike. But they don't see things from the same point of view as we do."

"Ruth is as bad as Uriah Heep," said Isabel, "always crackling her knuckles, and saying 'how 'umble we are.' Now I believe that the Lennoxes are as good as the Gascoignes or the Wentworths, or any one you choose to name."

"Very possibly; but perhaps the Wentworths don't think so."

"Then we must enlighten them," said David.

"And, besides," said Isabel, "it seems to me that it is only another form of pride to avoid consorting with people lest they should look down upon you; don't you think so, Dr. Berkeley?"

"It depends," he replied; and David laughed at the Doctor's diplomatic answer.

"Very likely it may be pride," said Ruth; "I told you that I did not know whether it was right or wrong. But I do know that I feel like a foreigner in an exclusive set, which has its own interests, and even its own expressions."

"The truth is," said the Doctor, speaking as he was apt to do of Ruth rather than to her; "the truth is, that Miss Lennox has always sought her happiness where her duties lie."

"That remark is aimed at me," remarked Isabel, "because you suspect me of disloyalty to Holmdale."

"It is not a suspicion, Miss Isabel, but a certainty."

"Though, after all," said Isabel, "*you* do not greatly affect the Holmdale tea-parties."

"I am too old for such frivolities."

"And I," retorted Isabel, "am too young for such solemnities. When I attain to middle age, and to mediocrity in general, I may find them as charming as Ruth does — in theory."

"I never said that they were charming," said Ruth; "only that it was not worth while to make a grievance of what was, after all, but a two hours' penance."

"Such an attractive picture of society!" said David. "When Isabel and I accepted the invitation to Dyne Court, it was in hopes of finding it a pleasure, not a penance."

"Lord Edward Lynmere is there," remarked the Doctor; "he called on me the other day, and he is very sensible and agreeable, although his infatuation for the little heiress is no great proof of his wisdom. And what do you think of this Captain Gascoigne? Mrs. Lennox said that he was walking with you to-day."

"Oh, he is a very good fellow," said David; "but not at all in Lord Edward's way, from what I have heard of that worthy."

Ruth and Isabel forbore to express an opinion.

• CHAPTER XVIII.

Wie hieß die Fee? Lili. Fragt nicht nach ihr!
Kennt Ihr sie nicht, so danket Gott dafür.

Welch ein Geräusch, welch ein Gegacker,
Wenn sie sich in die Thüre stellt,
Und in der Hand das Futterkörbchen hält,
Welch ein Gequack, welch ein Gequacker,
So stürzen sich ganze Heerden zu ihren Füßen.

GOETHE.

MONDAY was rainy, and the sound of carriage-wheels grinding the wet gravel was hailed as a welcome diversion by the party gathered in the drawing-room at Dyne Court, rather tired of each other's society, and beginning to wonder how soon it would be lawful to retire to their respective rooms, to enjoy a cup of servants' tea, and skim through a three-volume novel, until dressing-time. Captain Gascoigne did not wait for his cousin's bidding to go out into the hall to welcome the Lennoxes; and his presence made the introduction to so many strangers appear less formidable to Isabel.

David had not danced at all the garrison balls, and paid

morning visits to the officers' wives, without acquiring the easy fluency which was, not long since, considered the distinguishing characteristic of his profession; and before Isabel was sufficiently reassured to raise her eyes, he had entered into conversation with Lady Maria Wentworth, and had made the interesting discovery of her near relationship to his best friend, Harry Newry. Lady Maria, as Isabel determined, after one or two fleeting glances, "must be easy to get on with." Though no longer young, she had some remains of beauty; she was fair and stately, and her manner was open and pleasant. The tall, middle-aged gentleman, with a bald head and a benevolent aspect, who leaned against the mantelpiece and listened to all she said with such devoted attention, must be her husband, Mr. Wentworth. And further, Isabel could not pursue her researches at present, since her attention was claimed by Sir John.

"A sad rainy day, is it not, Miss Lennox? only fit for the ducks, and particularly annoying with a houseful of company. And if the fine weather had lasted for two days more, all my fields would have been cleared."

"You are more forward than your neighbours," said Isabel; "it was quite distressing to see so much standing corn as we came along."

In return for her sympathy, Isabel was favoured with a calculation of the probable amount of damage which must ensue from this change of weather. She did not find the subject much more entertaining than those current at the Holmdale tea-parties, and she was grateful to Captain Gascoigne for effecting a diversion.

"You can tell us, Sir John," he said, "how low the glass fell last night. Lynmere was asking just now."

Sir John turned to satisfy Lord Edward's curiosity, and his place was promptly supplied by his nephew.

"I hope, Miss Lennox, that our long walk on Saturday was not too much for you."

"Oh, no, thank you. I did not find it long, and I should have liked to go round by the Ashes, only that would have been too far for Ruth."

"I saw by your face just now," said Captain Gascoigne, "that you are rather intolerant of weather topics, or I should hope that the rain may not continue, to interfere with an exploring walk to-morrow. You need not be alarmed," he added, observing with a smile that Isabel coloured at this instance of his penetration; "you did not betray yourself to Sir John, and I certainly shall not betray you. Now, do tell me what we shall do with another rainy day."

"I shall not much mind," said Isabel; "for I know all the walks round here, and they are not half so pretty as our own. I shall go and dig in the library, and make a list of the books I want to read, and dip into those which are too heavy to carry away. There is a Hollinshed —"

Captain Gascoigne had acquired abroad the habit of shrugging his shoulders with true foreign action, and the gesture was accompanied by a comic look of horror, at which Isabel could not forbear to laugh.

"A Hollinshed! Do you really propose to study a black letter chronicle by way of a pleasant recreation?"

"It is not black letter, replied Isabel; "but a folio edition of 1635, beautifully printed, as most books of that date are."

"Then you are a connoisseur in type, Miss Lennox?"

"It is a hobby of the Doctor's," said Isabel, colouring; "and I have acquired a little of the taste from him."

"I hope that Dr. Berkeley is well," said Lord Edward Lynmere, turning round at the sound of his name. An acquaintance begun by a casual meeting at the Red House was now ripening into friendship, in spite of the contrast between what Isabel called Lord Edward's grand courteous manner, and the Doctor's rather quaint simplicity.

"The Doctor!" said Clara, also catching at the name. "I have not told you, Isabel, how, on your account and that of Lord Edward, I have despatched an invitation to him for to-morrow night. But do you think that you could, in compassion to my ignorance, give him a friendly hint not to talk either Hebrew or Sanscrit?"

"The Doctor," said Isabel, "like all really learned men, makes no parade of his knowledge."

"You alarm me more and more," said Captain Gascoigne. "With how many learned men do you claim acquaintance?"

"Only with the Doctor," said Isabel, again laughing and blushing; "but he is a host in himself."

"Do you think that he will come, Miss Lennox?" said Lord Edward, who had looked eager and interested from the moment that Clara professed to have made the invitation partly on his account.

"I hope he will," said Evelyn, before she could reply; "for he has a prior claim to Hollinshed, and so I may escape."

"Even if the Doctor does not come," said Clara, "Isabel may find some one to share her literary tastes. Shall I introduce you to Mr. James Courtown, that studious youth in spectacles, who has been reading ever since breakfast?"

"Nothing very deep, however," said Isabel, glancing across the room; "it is *Nicholas Nickleby*, by the cover."

"No, is it, really?" said Clara, much amused. "You know our books, outside and in, so much better than I do. I thought it was something dreadfully learned."

"I had an indistinct idea that the young man was an imposition," observed Captain Gascoigne, "and yet I was almost taken in by the air of dignified decision with which he waived off his brother, when he proposed a walk. Did you see the scene, Clara?"

"Between Gerry and Jem?" said Clara. "Yes, I was much edified. But Jem was so far justified in standing on his dignity, that Gerry was only reduced to his brother when he failed in getting any other companion. He applied to me among the rest; but I hinted that I was not amphibious, and instanced you, Isabel, as the only young lady of my acquaintance who was gifted with that convenient property, and went out in all weathers in boots of fabulous thickness. Thereupon he brightened up, and said he was glad you were coming, for he remembered dancing with you at a Christmas party, and thinking you rather jolly. I hope you appreciate the compliment."

"Yes," said Isabel; "I have seen enough of schoolboys to understand the force of the epithet."

"I remember," said Evelyn, "that Gerry and his companions became rather jolly at supper that night, so that you were glad to escape from their attentions."

"They were rather rough," said Isabel, recalling the scene and the favourable contrast presented by Evelyn's more polished manners; "but he was very merry and good-humoured."

In such general talk she was happy and at ease, and the interruption was unwelcome when David crossed the room to say that Lady Maria Wentworth wished to be introduced to her. She complied with an accession of shyness, yet Lady Maria contrived to be as much charmed with her glowing beauty as she had already been with her brother's powers of conversation; and disregarding a piteous glance from Isabel's speaking eyes, David conceived that they might prosecute the acquaintance without him, and that politeness, as well as inclination, required him to address himself to Miss Gascoigne.

Perhaps the same thought had occurred to Clara some time before, and she chose to show her sense of his neglect, for her manner was much less encouraging than it had been on a former occasion; she turned from him with careless inattention to continue her discussion with Lord Edward and her cousin. With an air of pique, which an older man would have been at greater pains to conceal, David stood aloof in moody silence, provoked, and yet irresistibly attracted by the arch, sidelong glances which Clara occasionally directed towards him.

Young Courtown's entrance caused the next diversion, in such muddy guise as only he could have thought admissible into a drawing-room. His abstracted brother was roused to admonish him in an undertone. "Oh, Gerry, your boots!" while the rest of the party regarded him with something between amusement and dismay.

"My boots are well enough; I have scraped them," replied Gerald, with a defensive air; and after waiting in vain for some one to confirm the assertion, he added, "of course you don't

expect them to be as well polished as your own, after walking over the field."

The elder brother had satisfied his conscience with the protest, and subsided once more into *Nicholas Nickleby*, while Gerald glanced doubtfully at Isabel, and applied to Clara before he ventured to address her. "Is that herself or her sister?"

"Herself, if you mean Miss Isabel Lennox," Clara answered, with laudable gravity. "Shall I tell her that you wish to renew acquaintance?"

"No, thank you," said Gerald, after a second inspection. It was evident that Isabel, whom he had last seen as a laughing girl, with a manner almost as untutored as his own, was transformed into a young lady with whom he had nothing in common, though she was, as he informed his brother, worth looking at. So, after answering Sir John's inquiries respecting his walk, he discovered that it was time to dress, and he sauntered out of the room again.

It was the signal for a general move, and Clara took Isabel up to her room — just such a room as she delighted in, with mulioned windows, deep embrasures, and irregular angles. And it was possible that her satisfaction was heightened by Clara's remark that she had been guided in her choice by Evelyn Gascoigne, "who declared that you, of all the guests, were most likely to appreciate the wainscoted chamber."

"I could guess," said Isabel, "that Lady Maria is modern in her tastes, and in favour of a high, square room, with a flowery paper."

"Lady Maria," replied Clara, "is sufficiently complaisant to rave about old oak and the dark ages, when she finds that you have a turn that way. But, if you think her too modern, what will you say to the Thomasons?"

"Are there more people in the house?" Isabel asked, in dismay. "I thought we had seen them all."

"There are these Thomasons still in reserve, besides Lord Raeburn, who was, I imagine, in the smoking-room with Thomason *filis*. The ladies had retired to write letters before

your arrival. They are regular London people, whom it was necessary to ask in return for all the balls at which I have danced at their house, but they are rather a *gêne*, as lady guests are apt to be — the present company always excepted. Not that Laura gives me much trouble, as long as she can get the Captain to flirt with."

The shade of bitterness in Clara's tone surprised Isabel, and she observed a harassed expression in the lines of her small and pretty mouth. But it vanished before her scrutiny, and Clara said lightly —

"The services of the subaltern will be nearly as invaluable as those of the captain. How well he did his manners to Lady Maria!"

"I don't know what you mean by doing his manners," said Isabel, displeased by the expression. "David is the same to every one."

"I meant nothing disrespectful of your paragon," said Clara, laughing. "Indeed, you might be affronted to hear how immensely I admire him. Now I must run away, or I shall be late for dinner. I will send Annette to you as soon as I have done with her; and you must not thwart her genius, but let her make you as fine as she pleases."

Instead of attending to this advice, Isabel hastened to complete her toilette before the foreign maid knocked at the door, to ask what she could do for mademoiselle, and Isabel wished that her assistance had not been required to fasten the muslin dress, which those quick black eyes could not fail to discover had been washed more than once. She detected a latent sarcasm in the words "*Voilà tout!*" with which Annette handed to her her only ornament, a spray of pink coral which David had brought with him from the Mediterranean, and, at once mortified and ashamed of her mortification, she almost wished herself at home.

David was lodged in the opposite wing of the house. Clara had already gone down, and Isabel prepared with some trepidation to make her entrance alone into the drawing-room. But she escaped the dreaded ordeal; for Evelyn Gascoigne came

out of his room at the end of the corridor at the same moment, and he waited for her at the foot of the stair, that they might go in together. With still greater consideration, he found a vacant chair at the end of the room, into which she might slide almost unperceived, and he remained beside her talking. He pointed out to her those of the party whom she had not before seen; Lord Raeburn, whom Isabel failed to recognise in the moustached and elaborately dressed young man who was making himself agreeable to Clara, and the family of the Thomasons, — the mother, who was only remarkable for the brilliancy of her diamonds, her tall light-haired son, and her daughter, Laura, handsome, dashing, and over-dressed. When dinner was announced it appeared that Clara had destined her cousin to Miss Thomason; but he had already given his arm to Isabel, and they went in together.

It was the first time that Isabel had seen Clara in general society, and she was amused to watch her powers of fascination, although she would have been better pleased not to see them exercised on her brother. David came in with Miss Thomason; but he secured a place beside Clara, and neglected his own lady most unwarrantably, in order to make his peace with her. In this he perfectly succeeded. Lord Raeburn looked sullen and displeased, Lord Edward abstracted and unhappy, while Clara lavished all her smiles on David, and suffered her duties as hostess to devolve on him, after repeatedly declining Lord Raeburn's offered help.

If all the party had shared the same delusion, there would have been little general conversation. But, happily, Mr. Wentworth was too much in love with his own wife to see anything to admire in a little pink and white thing with no intellect in her face; so he atoned for David's neglect by devoting himself to Miss Thomason, while at the same time he ate his dinner very composedly, and pleased Sir John by his approbation of its *matériel*. Lady Maria's talk was fluent as ever, and adapted to the tastes of her hearers; even Mr. James Courtown was roused to animation by her intelligent questions about Cambridge, while Sir John was equally interested in the discussion of some

measure affecting the agricultural interest. And Mr. Thomason talked mercilessly across his mother of horses and dogs.

Captain Gascoigne also, as Isabel perceived with a thrill of pleasure of which she would have been ashamed, had she been conscious of it, was wholly uninfluenced by his cousin's variable humour. His cool, penetrating glance betrayed no deeper interest than curiosity to discover to what lengths the spirit of coquetry might carry her, and his tone in speaking of her scarcely expressed the degree of cousinly regard which he might be supposed to feel. Clara, on her side, did not attempt to exact the homage which was withheld, and her manner in addressing him was only distinguished by an additional shade of flightiness.

Isabel had not yet forgotten the depreciating remark, almost approaching to a warning, with which David had first mentioned Evelyn Gascoigne, hinting that he did not wish her to like him. But the words were only recalled with an indignant sense of their injustice, for the more she saw of Evelyn the more unfounded the mistrust appeared. His manner was open, pleasant, and unreserved, and did not, like that of his cousin, vary with the caprice of the moment; so that she was inclined to retort the caution which seemed so unnecessary for herself, when she saw how absolutely David had yielded to the fascination of Clara's charms. The compassion with which Isabel regarded the hopes which Clara had in several instances inspired, was not unmingled with contempt, and it was mortifying to be obliged to count David in the train of her admirers. So it was, however; the passing fancy was already deepening into the passion of a first love, and Clara's smile of conscious power betrayed her determination to rivet his chains.

But Isabel had only leisure to bestow a momentary feeling of vexation on the matter, for Captain Gascoigne claimed the attention which she was not unwilling to bestow, and the time passed quickly in lively colloquy. Constraint and shyness were so far forgotten that she was able to reply to his raillery with something of the saucy readiness which had hitherto been reserved for her arguments with the Doctor. Captain Gascoigne,

however, was an opponent less easily discomfited, defending his opinions, and impugning hers with equal facility and better logic than her own, as she laughingly admitted, when he undertook to refute a somewhat extravagant expression of admiration for the days of chivalry.

When the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room, Clara's animation subsided. As soon as she had had coffee, she coiled herself into a deep arm-chair, observing that a rainy day always made her sleepy, and she closed her eyes without farther apology, although Isabel doubted whether her slumbers were very profound. Miss Thomason also became quiescent over a novel, but Lady Maria talked as assiduously as ever; and since her remarks received little encouragement from the others, she devoted herself to Isabel, and good-naturedly taught her a new stitch for the purse which was to replace the tattered and discoloured remains of her original gift to David. And this naturally led to some talk of David himself, a subject of which the sister was not soon weary.

On the whole, the evening passed pleasantly enough, except that Isabel was annoyed by Lord Raeburn's evident inclination to transfer to her the attentions of which Clara was so little worthy. He sat down beside her, twirling his moustache; but his vapid observations received tardy answers, and his advances were repelled by a certain quiet dignity rather than by shyness, since Isabel did not care enough about him to feel embarrassed. Another circumstance marred her pleasure, namely, Clara's behaviour to Lord Edward. After some discussion of a quotation from Pope, which she wished to verify, Clara appealed to Isabel to know in what part of the library his works were to be found.

"I am not certain of the shelf," answered Isabel; "but all the poets live behind the door into Sir John's study. I could easily find it by daylight."

"Lord Edward can find it now," said Clara, as he instantly rose and fetched a candle.

"Let me go," Isabel said, in a low voice to Clara; "he is so near-sighted, and I don't believe that he knows his way about the library much better than you do."

"Then it is time that he should learn," said Clara, lightly; "there is no need for you to go and dig in those dusty shelves in the dark."

Isabel was obliged to acquiesce, but her countenance expressed dissatisfaction, which Clara did not forbear to ridicule. "You scrupulous child! You see that he is delighted to be my errand-monger."

"Yes," rejoined Isabel; "and for that very reason I would not send him."

Clara laughed and went on talking to David; and when, after twenty minutes' search, Lord Edward returned with the book open at the passage in question, her interest in the matter seemed to have subsided, and she carelessly signed to him to put it down. Lord Edward turned away, after waiting in vain for a word or look of acknowledgment, and Isabel's brow reddened with indignation at this studied slight.

Captain Gascoigne saw and remarked on her sense of his wrongs. "You look," he said, "as if you were responsible for Clara's caprice."

"So I am, in a sense," said Isabel, colouring still more deeply; "I am a woman."

Evelyn laughed, as he replied, "At that rate, I ought to be humiliated by the folly and weakness displayed by those who submit to the dictates of her humour."

"Are you aware," said Clara, turning quickly round, "that it is very bad manners to talk too low to be heard by the rest of the company?"

"Do you wish to hear what we were saying?" said Evelyn, fixing his eyes on his cousin; and Clara seemed to quail before the cool and steady gaze, though she answered promptly, "Unquestionably I do."

"Then I will tell you," said Evelyn; and his report abated nothing of the severity of the censure. "I wish to reassure Miss Lennox, whose too sensitive conscience is burdened by the thralldom you impose on your admirers. Now I maintain that it would be equally reasonable to assume that I share the responsibility of their infatuated submission."

Isabel wondered, not that Clara's laugh was forced, but at the levity which permitted her to laugh at all in reply to such a reproof. Nor did she show any signs of compunction, for she continued to treat Lord Edward with the same careless disdain throughout the evening.

CHAPTER XIX.

*This weak impress of love is as a figure
Trenched in ice; which with an hour's heat
Dissolves to water, and doth lose his form.*

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

BREAKFAST in a country house is apt to be a silent meal, especially when, as was the case on the following morning, the unsettled state of the weather interfered with any arrangement of the plans for the day. The post came in; and since neither letters nor paper fell to Isabel's share, she subsided into a dream, from which she was roused by a demand from Clara to know her thoughts.

"I believe I was thinking of mamma and Ruth," she answered; "it is tantalizing to be so near, and yet not to know how they are."

"If you like," said Evelyn, "I will go over to Holmdale to inquire."

Isabel thanked him, without supposing him to be in earnest, and Clara was still less prepared for his reply, when the two cousins were left together in the breakfast-room, and she proposed that Evelyn should look over some plans for a new garden below the terrace.

"Not this morning, Clara; I must execute Miss Lennox's behests."

"Do you really mean to walk to Holmdale?" said Clara, incredulously.

"No, I shall ride."

"But, Evelyn, I wish that you would look at the plans first, for I want to set the work on foot while you are here."

"Surely," said Evelyn, "you have squires enough at command without pressing me into the service. Lennox's taste is excellent."

"And then," said Clara, hastily, "you accuse me of flirting."

"I accuse you of nothing, Cousin Clara. I recognise the fact, without feeling either the right or the inclination to interfere with such a harmless pursuit." He left the room, whistling as he went, and the plans for the new garden were thrust back into the drawer from which Clara had taken them.

Isabel wondered what had become of Captain Gascoigne, when the other gentlemen came in at intervals to report upon the weather, for he only returned towards the end of luncheon; and if the ride had been taken to give her pleasure, he must have been fully rewarded by the bright face she turned towards him. "Have you *really* been to Holmdale?"

"Yes, really; but I am afraid that your sister did not thank me. She caught sight of me riding up the street, and came down to the door with a very white face, expecting, I believe, to hear that some casualty had befallen you or Lennox."

"Ruth is so quick to take alarm," said Isabel, gravely.

"And no wonder," added David, "when she sits all day in that half light, letting her mind dwell on all possible and impossible evils."

"How can you tell, David? I believe that she is only working out lessons of patience."

"Go on," said Clara, hearing as usual all that passed while apparently intent on something altogether different; "Ruth's character is a problem which I shall be glad to solve."

"You never will, Clara, for you have not the key."

"And what is that, Isabel? I know that something severe is implied, but I don't understand."

Isabel was embarrassed by the consciousness that Captain Gascoigne, as well as her brother, waited for her reply, and she lowered her voice and answered briefly, "Ruth is always in earnest."

"Your sisters think me frivolous and shallow," said Clara,

turning to David; and the playful appeal roused him in her defence.

"Never mind Isabel's high-flown theories. It is my private opinion that Isabel has as good a capacity for enjoying life as any of us."

"Very likely," said Isabel, laughing. "I know that I mean to do what I can in that way this afternoon. Do you know, Captain Gascoigne, that I really did find Hollinshed rather dry, and I must have a walk to chase away the cobwebs."

"Are you going out?" said Gerald Courtown, catching at the words; "some people seemed to think it too wet."

"Some people, meaning myself, prefer driving," said Clara. "I am to drive Lady Maria and Mrs. Thomason in the pony carriage, and there is room for you, Isabel, if you like to come."

"I would rather walk with David," said Isabel; but David had another suggestion to make. He declared that the wind and driving showers would make it disagreeable for Miss Gascoigne to drive herself, and she accepted his proffered services. This left no place for Isabel, but she repeated, with perfect sincerity, that she would rather walk, and she was only doubtful whether it would be correct as well as pleasant to consent to Captain Gascoigne's proposal, that she should go with him and Gerry to Leonard's Oak. Her scruples were set at rest, however, when Miss Thomason resolved to join the party; and in the end they mustered strong, for Lord Raeburn emerged from the stables, and Lord Edward joined them on the terrace, looking guilty when Evelyn accused him of making his escape from a ride over the farms with Sir John.

Miss Thomason rivalled Clara's genius for a flirtation; but she did not exercise her talent with the same grace, and Isabel's rather fastidious taste was offended by the loudness of her laugh, and the freedom with which she expressed her opinions. Almost insensibly they divided company. Miss Thomason had a great deal to say to Captain Gascoigne, who did not seem to be otherwise than amused, and Lord Raeburn talked as assiduously to Isabel, although she was not so well disposed to

listen. Lord Edward walked on her other side; but when David drove past them, bowing from his seat beside Clara with a smile of proud pleasure, he became so silent and abstracted, that his presence did not afford her much protection.

Several times in the course of their walk Isabel wished herself at home, without being aware of the real cause of her dissatisfaction. She believed that she was only annoyed by Lord Raeburn, and knew not with how much of wounded feeling she resented Captain Gascoigne's acquiescence in Miss Thomason's desire to monopolize his attention. Perhaps he could not help himself, and yet she had seen enough of Evelyn to be aware that his will was not so easily controlled.

"This is the oak," said Gerald Courtown, who hovered between the two parties without attaching himself to either; "a ragged old stump, and not to be compared to many in your Chase, Raeburn."

"Indeed!" said the young lord, languidly. "You know so much more of my place than I do myself."

Isabel's large liquid eyes lighted up with indignant scorn, on which Gerald was not slow to comment. "You need not believe him, Miss Lennox; it is only swagger."

"It is nothing of the sort," said Lord Raeburn; and although he could not understand Isabel's displeasure, he conceived some explanation to be necessary. "I am not much at home, you know — on duty with my regiment, and I find so much to do when I come down here, that I am as little as possible at the Chase. The bailiff comes with an arm full of papers before I have done breakfast, and the farmers want to see my lord himself about a reduction of rent. That sort of thing is rather a bore, so I keep out of the way, and I dare say they do as well without me."

"Very likely," said Isabel, turning from him to Gerald. "You should say nothing disrespectful of Leonard's Oak, Mr. Courtown. Everything looks gray to-day; but it is a very picturesque object on a sunny afternoon, particularly in early spring."

"I dare say it is, only I don't care about the picturesque. But as to its girth."

"Oh, don't tell me the number of inches. I am sure I care still less about its girth. Next you will tell me how many people might dine in the hollow trunk, and nothing incenses me so much. I wish you could take the historical line, and say how many generations have lived and died since Leonard planted his oak, and who Leonard was, for I cannot find out."

"Probably," said Evelyn, who now came up with them, "a Saxon serf, who herded swine in the forest in the days of William Rufus."

"Oh no," said Isabel, decidedly, "Leonard is not a Saxon name;" and Lord Edward was amused by the ready objection, and declared that she was qualified to sift evidence on a committee.

"There is distinction for you!" said Miss Thomason, laughing. "I am not too learned to accept Captain Gascoigne's conjecture. It *shall* be a Saxon serf, and we may devise some plausible excuse for his foreign name. Perhaps he was adopted by a Norman noble, and planted the oak in memory of his former servitude."

"I don't care to weave a romance," said Isabel, turning to Lord Edward, as the only one of the party likely to follow her meaning; so much had her opinion of Captain Gascoigne changed in the course of their half-hour's walk.

Lord Edward did *not* understand, or did not exert himself to assent, and Miss Thomason said, with *brusquerie*, "That shows a want of imagination."

"Say, rather," rejoined Evelyn, "that it is the proof of a vivid imagination. Miss Lennox so fully realizes the past, that she feels it to be an insult to the real Leonard, who lived and died, to give him a fictitious history. Is it not so, Miss Lennox?"

"Something like it," said Isabel, colouring with pleasure.

"I suppose it will affront you," said young Courtown, rejoining the group, "but I have paced the tree, and it is really a sizeable specimen. And next I shall have an opportunity of telling you how many might dine in the trunk, for you ought to take refuge there, unless you wish to get wet through. A shower is coming up."

"Let us get into the trunk by all means," said Miss Thomason, "that will be charming."

"I suppose it is from want of imagination again," said Isabel; "but I think a hollow trunk is apt to be mouldy, damp, and disagreeable, and I would rather get wet in a legitimate way in the open air."

Captain Gascoigne, however, dissented from this opinion, and in suffering him to take care of her there was a satisfaction which she could not readily forego. He secured for her the opening, and stood beside her to ward off the rain, disregarding her assurances that nothing gave her cold. And in this way the time passed so pleasantly, that Miss Thomason was the first to be impatient of delay, and to discover that the shower had blown over.

They retraced their steps in a different order, Captain Gascoigne walking first with the two ladies, while Lord Raeburn rather sulkily fell behind with Gerald Courtown, and contemplated the expediency of renouncing ladies' society until they learned to estimate the loss they must sustain in consequence of such a step.

"This schoolmaster is the only accession to our party to-night," remarked Miss Thomason; "and I gather, from Clara Gascoigne's description, that he is what my brother calls a circumstance. Is it not so, Miss Lennox?"

"I don't quite know what you mean by a circumstance," said Isabel; "but he is a scholar and a gentleman, and a great friend of ours."

"That is a circumstance," rejoined Miss Thomason, undaunted by Isabel's defensive tone. "Your great scholars are apt to be unpolished specimens."

"Dr. Berkeley came in while I was with Miss Lennox," said Evelyn; "and I saw enough of him to be glad that we are to meet again this evening."

Isabel rightly judged that a word from Captain Gascoigne would make Miss Thomason more sensible of her want of good breeding than anything which she could say. Laura seemed

to feel that she had had enough of the subject, and she turned back to talk to Lord Raeburn.

"You did not tell me that you had seen the Doctor," said Isabel; "he must be glad to have one stranger less to encounter, for he is very shy. I cannot think how he made up his mind to the effort of coming here."

"His mind was made up for him," said Evelyn; "at least, so I concluded from something he said ruefully to your sister. And it is very evident that she can ask nothing of him in vain."

"Ruth and he are very good friends," said Isabel, quickly; and, as Captain Gascoigne replied by a meaning smile, she added, "He is nothing more, indeed; we have known him ever since we were children." And when, in pondering over the incidents of the walk, Captain Gascoigne's insinuation recurred to her mind, it was dismissed as simply an amusing instance of the misapprehensions which ensue from a brief acquaintance.

CHAPTER XX.

Sie saßen und tranken am Theetisch,
Und sprachen von Liebe viel.
Die Herren, die waren ästhetisch,
Die Damen von zartem Gefühl.

H. HEINE.

THE Doctor looked far from happy at the end of the long dinner table. He was near Sir John, who, instead of leaving him in peace, attempted to restore his equanimity by well-chosen topics,—questions about the new school buildings, and statistics gleaned from the last Board of Guardians. But his trouble was thrown away. The Doctor could hear nothing but the creaking of shoes and the clattering of dishes, and he looked scared, distracted, and miserable. Lady Maria took him in hand; but even her powers of conversation were baffled, and she was obliged to relinquish the attempt "to draw him out." Availing himself of the earliest opportunity of rejoining the ladies in the drawing-room, he was so fortunate as to find Isabel sitting

a little apart from the rest, and he instantly repaired to her side.

"Ah, Miss Isabel," he said, reproachfully, "you have not allowed me to speak a word to you."

"I could not stay down-stairs until you came," Isabel replied, "for I was in walking guise. Besides, it is quite *de rigueur* that the ladies should retire for an hour before dinner."

"But at dinner you might have contrived to be nearer me."

A certain consciousness that she had made no effort to do so did not check Isabel's inclination to stand on the defensive.

"It was not for me to marshal the guests; and as a matter of course people fall into their old places, so I went where I sat the night before."

"You will become quite learned in the ways of the world, Miss Isabel."

"Well," retorted Isabel, "if I learn nothing worse than these two usages, there is no harm done."

"That was Captain Gascoigne to whom you were talking all through dinner?"

Isabel briefly assented, as she applied herself to the task of rearranging her bouquet.

"And David seemed to be as much taken with Miss Gascoigne."

"You don't seem to understand," answered Isabel, annoyed by this unconscious revelation of the Doctor's train of thought, "you don't seem to understand the great social duty of talking to your next neighbour at dinner time. Lady Maria's attentions to you were a laudable instance of perseverance under difficulties."

"They were very ill bestowed," said Dr. Berkeley. "I was wishing myself in my study all the while, or at your comfortable tea-table. I wonder why I consented to come out."

"You cannot wonder more than I do. Captain Gascoigne says that Ruth sent you."

"How should he know?" the Doctor asked, in a quick, nervous voice.

"He guessed as much from something which passed at his

visit this morning. But I want to get at the matter, for I don't understand why Ruth, who discouraged our escapade, should cause you to plunge into the vortex of dissipation."

"Perhaps, because she does not care what becomes of me. And, at all events, it does not affect me in the same way; for my only consolation is that it is but one night's penance, and I shall not even stay for breakfast to-morrow."

"So that you will not have to undergo another meal," said Isabel, laughing. "Now don't go and tell Ruth that we are getting into mischief. Only say that we shall go home to tell our own story on Thursday. To-morrow there is to be a grand expedition to Witham Abbey."

"So Lord Edward told me."

"Ah! that reminds me to observe that you don't make the most of your opportunities. Surely Lord Edward is sober and sensible enough to suit you, and he was within speaking distance at dinner."

"One might as well speak to the winds when Miss Gascoigne is in the room. When she came in before dinner, I was telling him of the new discoveries in the art of deciphering unknown tongues, and he began at once to answer at random, listening all the while to what she was saying to your brother. It is a singular infatuation."

"Not *singular*, I am sure, nor yet surprising. I did not know, until I saw her in her own set, how very attractive she is."

"She fidgets so, that it is quite fatiguing," said the Doctor, absently, as he looked across the room to Clara, who was talking, laughing, and moving her small taper fingers with the foreign action she had acquired from Madame la Rue. Perhaps he contrasted her restlessness with the habits of stillness and repose in which Ruth had been trained by her long attendance in a sick room.

Isabel's next remark showed that her thoughts were travelling in the same direction.

"Ruth told Captain Gascoigne that mamma was much as usual."

"Not so well as usual; at least, it was one of her bad days. Miss Lennox was quite surprised to see Captain Gascoigne, and she wondered whether he had ridden into Holmdale on purpose to inquire."

"I suppose that it was as good an object for a ride as another," said Isabel, carelessly. She was rather tired of answering or evading the Doctor's home questions, and she rejoiced in the diversion effected by Clara's approach.

"Don't you think," said that young lady, "that there is a want of originality in talking to Isabel, which you can do any day at Holmdale?"

"Well," said the Doctor, assuming an air of resignation. It was the only reply which occurred to him; and Lady Mary who was near enough to hear what was passing, wondered how he had gained the reputation of being a clever man.

"You don't know what other course to pursue," continued Clara, darting a glance of *espièglerie* and mischief towards Isabel, who seemed disposed to fire up in the Doctor's defence. "Cannot you talk to me?"

"I am afraid that I should not amuse you," the Doctor replied, with a reluctant smile.

"You are afraid that I should not understand you! That is very severe. But here is Mr. James Courtown — a rising scholar. Ah, he has fled;" for, as she turned towards the shy and silent youth, he hastily retreated from the impending introduction. "Or Lord Edward. I asked you quite on his account."

Clara did not this time appeal in vain. A word from her lips commanded Lord Edward's eager attention, and brought him to her side; and, though mortified to find that she had only summoned him to transfer him to Dr. Berkeley, they entered into conversation. Clara flitted away, and Isabel was at liberty to look about her, and wonder what had become of Captain Gascoigne. She presently descried him through the folding-doors opening into the music-room, where he was engaged in choosing a piece for Miss Thomason. Clara went there; and since David could not talk to her, it occurred to

him that he might as well join his sister for the sake of talking of her.

Isabel welcomed him with a brightening look.

"I have hardly seen you all day, David."

"That must be from a defect in your sight, for I have seen you, though we have not had much intercourse. And do you know what was the result of my inspection?"

"Something complimentary, I hope."

"I have discovered that you are not so well dressed as Miss Gascoigne."

"Which is not surprising, as I have not the same sum to spend upon my dress."

"Without being extravagant, it is possible to look nice. There is an unstudied grace about Miss Gascoigne —"

"Which you wish me to study, in order to imitate," said Isabel, playfully. "I thought you were thinking of the wearer, and not of the things worn."

David was too much in earnest to like her raillery, and he changed the subject.

"How well Miss Thomason plays."

"Very well," said Isabel. Captain Gascoigne lingered so long in the music-room, that it was evident he thought so too, and she began for the first time to regret the want of perseverance which had interfered with the attainment of any proficiency in that accomplishment. Reading had been more agreeable than practising; but now it appeared that clever people, and those too whose good opinion she valued, were afraid of learned ladies, and liked to listen to good music.

"Miss Thomason is over-dressed, if you like," said David; "such loud colours."

"She is *outrée* in everything," replied Isabel.

"Then you did not get on with her this afternoon?"

"We did not exactly fall out, but we have not much in common."

"We had a very pleasant drive," said David, "and it was lucky I went, for it would have been disagreeable for Miss

Gascoigne to drive home in the rain; as it was, she must have got wet if I had not taken my macintosh.

Isabel perceived that the privilege of having shielded Clara from the rain had much to do with David's overflowing happiness this evening, and an involuntary smile was checked by misgivings where all this was to end.

"Now, Lennox," said Captain Gascoigne, approaching the brother and sister, "it is your turn to do duty in the music-room; I am quite tired of turning over the leaves of Miss Thomason's book."

"It is not my vocation," said David; "I never know what to admire."

"Then it is time to learn, in order to qualify yourself for a staff appointment. It is an important branch of an A.D.C.'s duty."

"I see no prospect of a staff appointment at present," said David; "and, besides, Miss Thomason is not on speaking terms with me, though I can't imagine how I have offended her."

"On that point I can enlighten you; she confided to me that Mr. Lennox was so very dull at dinner last night, that she was quite resolved not to go in with him again. Go and make your peace now, and it will not be a long penance, for my cousin intends to sing as soon as this symphony is ended."

David required no second bidding, and he was duly grateful for information which enabled him to be in the field before Lord Edward. When Clara was the performer, there could be no difficulty what to admire, for all was faultless.

Captain Gascoigne drew in a chair, and sat down to talk to Isabel.

"So there is to be a grand expedition to Witham Abbey tomorrow. The pony carriage, the barouche, and the riding-horses must be put in requisition to convey the party. How do you mean to go?"

"I suppose Clara will settle," said Isabel.

"Unquestionably she will, unless we exert ourselves; and as I have a voice in the matter, I should like to know beforehand which you prefer. Are you fond of riding?"

"Only in theory, for I have had no opportunity of learning. And I am afraid that it will not do to make my *début* in a large cavalcade."

"No, there will be a risk, though I can easily imagine that any one so active and fearless might ride from intuition. Then we must drive."

"You need not," said Isabel, colouring and looking down; and unable to express more clearly that she did not wish him to make any sacrifice on her account.

"My choice is not disinterested," said Evelyn, pointedly, and Isabel was silenced. It was not his first speech of the kind, and though pleasant on reflection, she was too much embarrassed to find it pleasant at the time.

Captain Gascoigne went on talking, as if to give her time to recover herself.

"To-morrow need not be lost time, for if we secure the front seat of the pony carriage, I can teach you the use of the reins. And next day you can try a quiet ride."

"Next day," said Isabel, "we go home."

"Do you indeed? but four miles is no insuperable distance. Do you suppose that we shall not meet occasionally?"

"Gascoigne," said Mr. Thomason, sauntering up to him, "it is such a fine evening that Raeburn and I propose to have our cigar in the colonnade. Are you disposed to join us?"

"Presently," replied Evelyn; and to Lady Maria, who took a benevolent interest in the progress of a love affair, the interruption appeared even more inopportune than to Isabel. She professed an inclination to take a turn in the colonnade herself, and she asked whether Miss Lennox was afraid of the evening air?

No — Isabel never caught cold, and eagerly assented to the suggestion, so that Mr. Thomason was forced to postpone the enjoyment of his cigar, and give his arm to Lady Maria with as good a grace as he could assume. Isabel was not so soon ready, for, warm as the night was, Captain Gascoigne did not consider the shawl she had thrown about her a sufficient protection, and he wrapped her in a cloak of his own; and, as

before, Isabel found a new and strange delight in the solicitude which obliged her to relinquish her habitual defiance of such precautions. The soft radiance of the moonlight, and the stillness and fragrance of the evening air after the rain, were calculated to deepen the impressions to which Isabel was already sufficiently susceptible, and it was now, perhaps, for the first time, that she became fully conscious how absolutely the affections of her warm and loving heart were surrendered into the keeping of him who walked by her side, and drew her passive hand within his arm.

"Do you remember standing here to see the fireworks?" said Evelyn.

"So well! And how strange it seems to find ourselves here again," said Isabel. And yet not so strange as pleasant, as she thought after the words had passed her lips.

"Cousin Clare was in great force that night, I remember, beginning her career by setting up a flirtation with a school friend of Lennox's — was not his name Clinton?"

"Yes; poor Jasper Clinton," said Isabel, gravely at first, and then smiling at certain reminiscences which occurred to her. "How he did admire her! I so often think of that party."

"So do I," said Evelyn, although, if the truth were known, it might have appeared that the thought had hardly occurred to him from that day to this. "It was like a start in life, and the actors have kept up their characters consistently enough. Clara, for example; and Lennox was as genial and pleasant as he has been ever since; and your sister, I can see her now, sitting on the back bench, when others were dancing, looking sedate and dignified. And you —"

"Oh," said Isabel, drawing back, "please don't say what I was like."

"You need not be afraid," said Evelyn, but he desisted at her word.

CHAPTER XXI.

L'onda che mormora
Tra sponda e sponda,
L'aura che tremola
Tra fronda e fronda,
È meno instabile
Del vostro cor!

METASTASIO.

THE Doctor went home on the following morning, and he found his way to the Red House as soon as his avocations permitted. Mrs. Lennox was not well enough to see him, but Ruth came down at once.

"Well," he said, "I have come to tell my news."

"I hoped you would come," said Ruth. "I am curious to hear how they are getting on."

"They seem very happy. Miss Isabel came down before I left, quite pleased that it was a fine day, for they are all going over to Witham."

"But you know what I want to hear," said Ruth, with a touch of playfulness; "that Isabel made a great impression."

"She looked very well. I think hers a much higher style of beauty than Miss Gascoigne's."

"And did no one else show the same discrimination?"

"I have so little observation," said the Doctor, rather piteously; "but I will tell you who talked to her all the evening — Captain Gascoigne."

"Oh!" said Ruth; and her tone was dissatisfied. "What did you think of him?"

"I had no opportunity of judging; but he looks gentleman-like, and his easy, pleasant manner must just suit Miss Isabel."

"And Lord Edward, had you any talk with him?"

"Not much; he was always hanging about Miss Gascoigne. And, do you know, that David is just as bad. He hardly seemed

to know that another person was in the room. But I don't wonder that she likes to talk to him, for he is the greatest gentleman among them. His air is so striking, and his gay, courteous manner, at once spirited and gentle. It will be strange if anything comes of it, and yet strange things have happened."

"You are not going to turn match-maker," said Ruth, with a smile. "It is quite out of keeping with your years and decorum."

The Doctor looked confused, but he did not attempt to justify himself; and his next remark showed that his thoughts were still occupied with the same subject.

"After all, I suppose that Miss Gascoigne will be no such great heiress, for something must go with the title."

"I believe that it is all in Sir John's power," said Ruth; "but it is most likely that he will provide handsomely for his nephew, whose education he undertook; and he bought his company for him the other day. However, you may be certain that no division of the property can make David's suit appear anything but unpardonable presumption."

"You know Miss Gascoigne better than I do," replied Dr. Berkeley; "but I have heard enough of her to doubt whether she would be much influenced by Sir John's wishes."

"I don't undertake to calculate probabilities," said Ruth, amused by his pertinacity, "so settle it as you please, and I will give you credit for penetration, if your romance comes true. And, meanwhile, I am glad that they are enjoying life." But these last words were spoken with less than Ruth's usual sincerity, for there was more of anxiety than of satisfaction in her thoughts both of Isabel and her brother, and she was almost unreasonably impatient for their return.

Earlier on the following day than she had ventured to expect, Isabel's light step was heard upon the stair, and she sprang joyously into her mother's room.

"Well, mamma, here I am! very glad to be at home again; so Ruth must not think me quite spoiled. David is walking, and Clara drove me over, and is waiting to see Ruth, and I shall stay and tell you my news."

Ruth went down at once, anxious to hear Clara's report of the visit. It was more graphic than the Doctor's, but substantially the same.

"I have come," she said, "on purpose to tell of Isabel's success. Her dress was not quite knowing, and her manner rather too *posé*, yet she was very much admired, especially by Lord Raeburn and my cousin the Captain. Her beauty is really magnificent, and she quite eclipses me when we are thrown together."

"You wish to be contradicted," said Ruth; "but you do not need me to tell you that you are too unlike to provoke comparison."

"And therefore that no one who admires the one can be attracted by the other; but Lord Raeburn's inconstancy is a proof to the contrary. Do you know, Ruth, it occurs to me that I am growing dreadfully old, and that it is quite time to begin to fall in love. So I mean to cast about for a proper object, and I am quite ready to receive any suggestions which you have to make."

Ruth smiled and shook her head. "I am not going to play Nerissa's part."

"Because you think that no Bassanio is forthcoming?"

"No; but because you would not prize as it deserves a Bassanio's love."

"How do you know till I am tried? I declare I know hardly any one who would choose the leaden casket."

"You have no right to say so, Clara. You have encouraged those who sought you from motives not wholly disinterested, while trifling with such true and deep love as few women have known."

"Meaning the Forlorn Hope. But that is an old story now, and, excepting him, there is no one, or hardly any one, who really cares."

"Hardly any one," repeated Ruth; "surely one is enough."

"Certainly not," replied Clara, with one of her wayward smiles. "I must have a little variety of choice."

"It is of no use, Clara; you shall not tease me into saying

anything fierce. As you say, we are growing old, and I quite despair of correcting any one so incorrigible, and am content that we should each go our own way."

"I am not content," said Clara; "for sometimes I fancy that I should like to walk in the shade with you, and sometimes that I will draw you into the sunshine. Really, Ruth, you look more thin and pale and wearied every time we meet, and I must know the reason why. Do you sleep for two hours together?"

"Not often. I have lost the habit, but I do just as well without it."

"Do you eat enough to satisfy a healthy sparrow?"

"I should hope not; it is the most voracious and insatiable animal in existence. Now, Clara, I am not going to answer any more irrelevant questions; but I will, if you like, tell you what is on my mind just now. I know that I am foolishly anxious, but I cannot help fretting about Isabel. She is so unused to society, that she may take idle attentions and admiration for more than they are worth, and she is not like you. If, for pastime, her love is sought and won, and then slighted, the shadow will be cast on her whole life. Surely you will not suffer this."

"I am to turn Cerberus?" said Clara, looking amused by the idea. "It will be a new vocation; yet I might undertake it for your sake. Am I to intimate to any one who presumes to admire Isabel, that he may flirt with me as much as he pleases, but that she is to be considered as inaccessible as an enchanted princess in a fairy tale?"

"I might have known," said Ruth, "that it was folly to expect you to be serious for one instant."

"I will be serious, dear Ruth, rather than vex you. I think I can guess to whom your dark allusions point, but I am not able to give you any satisfaction; for I know less of my cousin the Captain than of any person whatever with whom I am on speaking terms. I cannot tell what he may mean by his assiduous attentions, and it is impossible for me either to make or mar in the matter."

Clara had scarcely made this declaration, with a heightened

colour and unusual excitement of manner, when Captain Gascoigne entered the room with David. It seemed that he was already established in habits of intimacy which rendered any apology for his early visit unnecessary; and when Isabel came down stairs, he had as much to say to her as if they had not parted only an hour before. It was equally a matter of course that David should attach himself to Ruth and Clara.

"I suppose," he said, "that Miss Gascoigne has told you all our news."

"No," answered Ruth; "I have heard nothing of your day at Witham."

"It was very successful," said David, glancing mischievously towards Isabel and the Captain; "some people missed seeing the ruins which were supposed to be the object of the expedition, but they did not appear to be inconsolable."

"No," replied Evelyn, with habitual coolness; "there is great sameness in ruins, and the woods were remarkably pleasant."

"Oh, then, perhaps the omission was intentional."

"You know it was not, David," said Isabel, looking distressed; "Lady Maria advised our going through the green gate, which we fancied led to the ruins, while she waited with Mr. Thomason for the rest of the party; and then we were bewildered among the paths, and could not find our way out."

"And were found," David added, "sitting on a fallen tree, very cool and composed, while we were tiring ourselves in search of them."

"I insisted that Miss Lennox should sit down, as she was becoming fatigued," said Evelyn.

Ruth did not wish that a discussion should be prolonged which disconcerted her sister as much as it entertained the other three; and she interposed with an inquiry how they contrived to divide company.

"Gascoigne or Isabel — I don't know which — drove at such a pace as to distance the barouche," said David, "and we who rode, knew better than to follow in their dust, and struck across country by a way new to Miss Gascoigne."

"Yes, we had such a pretty ride," said Clara. "Laura

Thomason was enchanted, and leaped ditches and scrambled through fences in grand style. She is what people call an excellent horsewoman."

"A very ungraceful and unfeminine thing to be," remarked David; "she deserved to break her neck two or three times over; and yet, if she had come to grief in any way, I should have been blamed."

"You are severe on Miss Thomason," said Evelyn; "but I presume that your other companion did not offend you in the same way. How many times did Clara dismount and give you her horse to manage as well as her own, and then fall into an interesting tremor lest you should injure yourself or Zohrab?"

The description was sufficiently accurate to provoke a smile, although David was eager to defend Clara from the lightest shadow of censure. "Miss Gascoigne is perfectly right," he said; "I dislike nothing so much as foolhardiness."

"And nothing," retorted Evelyn, "is so foolhardy as irrational timidity."

"Do not answer him, Mr. Lennox," said Clara, as she shook back her long silken curls. "The truth is, that the Captain is such a disagreeable and unaccommodating squire, that I ride with him as little as I can help, which is reason sufficient for these insulting remarks."

"He certainly does not deserve the honour," said David; "and I hope that you will never have recourse to him while you can command my services."

"It is lucky you are so well provided for, cousin Clara," said Evelyn; "but I mean to ride in your suite, if not as your squire. You must know," he added, turning to Ruth, "that your sister intends to take riding lessons."

"I have no doubt that Isabel would enjoy them," answered Ruth, rather stiffly; "but there is the slight difficulty that we possess neither horses nor riding gear."

"The first difficulty, at all events, may be easily overcome, when so many horses are standing idle in the Dyne Court stables; and your sister seemed to think that the last was not insurmountable. Indeed," continued Evelyn, in the softened

tone in which he generally addressed Isabel, "I intend you to prove that it is possible to be fearless without becoming unfeminine; and I consider that you quite promised to be ready for your first ride on Monday."

"Oh no, I did not promise," said Isabel, colouring.

"You did, indeed," repeated Evelyn, with playful earnestness; "you said you would if you could, and I know you can if you will, so I accepted the promise as unconditional; and I wrote to my mother that I was unavoidably prevented from joining the family party at Scarborough."

Clara bethought herself that it was time to return to her guests at home, and she only tarried to remind Isabel that she had not told of Lady Maria's pressing invitation.

"What was that?" Ruth asked, as David followed the Gascoignes to the carriage.

"An invitation to Wentworth Lodge," replied Isabel; "I don't know whether she was in earnest, but Lady Maria said in her rapturous way that she wished so much to gather the same pleasant party again at her own house, and her words were taken up and echoed as usual by Mr. Wentworth. She said she should try and fix a day early in next month."

"And so you have your wish, Isabel," said Ruth, "in tasting some of the gaieties of which you have heard so much. And how do you like it?"

"We had a very pleasant visit," said Isabel; but she was not communicative, reverting, after a few desultory remarks, to the matter which chiefly interested her. "You don't seem to wish me to learn to ride, Ruth. I have always wished it so much, and David has promised to give me a habit."

"I dare say it would be pleasant," said Ruth.

"And not prudent? I felt you would say so, but David saw no harm; and it seemed ungracious to refuse when Captain Gascoigne took pains to find which horse would suit me best. He fixed on that pretty brown creature which Clara sometimes rides; but she and Sir John both pressed me to use it as much as I please. And it has been one of my day-dreams to take long rides with David."

Ruth could not withstand Isabel's pleading tone, and relinquished the attempt to be prudent and hard-hearted, persuading herself that child-like enjoyment of the exercise might counteract more dangerous sentiments. So she remained passive when the matter was laid before their mother, who said languidly that it would be a nice amusement for Isabel; and thus the question was decided.

CHAPTER XXII.

Quell' alma, che piena è di speme,
Nulla teme, consiglio non sente,
E si forma una gioia presente
Del pensiero che lieta sarà.

METASTASIO.

It was about three weeks after this that Miss Perrott put on her silk mantle and her best bonnet, pulling out the bows with more than ordinary care, in preparation for a visit to the Red House, "since one never knows," she thought, "whom one may meet there." The drawing-room was empty, however, and Ruth was summoned down stairs to receive her visitor. Miss Perrott greeted her with the usual inquiries after Mrs. Lennox, adding, that she supposed it was useless to ask to see her.

"Quite, thank you," said Ruth. "Mamma has been so ill and weak lately — hardly able to see David for more than a few minutes at a time."

"Ah!" said Miss Perrott, with a consequential jerk of the best bonnet aforesaid. "Perhaps that is the reason your brother is so little at home."

"It is quite natural," said Ruth, "that the life of a quiet country town should have few attractions for a young man of David's age."

"Or for Isabel either, it appears."

"You know of old that Isabel was always resolved to follow where David led, and now they are more inseparable than ever."

"That *may* be very true, Ruth; but I think that such an old friend as I am has a right to expect a little more openness; and

I am not the only one to wonder whether your mother knows all that goes on, or if she can approve of it."

"We keep nothing from my mother which she can care to hear," said Ruth, steadily.

"I am an old friend, you know," repeated Miss Perrott, "or it might seem impertinent to interfere; but, of course, if Mrs. Lennox is satisfied, there is no more to be said."

Miss Perrott was apt to take offence, and it cost Ruth an effort to make the concession which was necessary to appease her in the present instance. She said, however, with as good a grace as she could assume, that she was very willing to hear Miss Perrott's advice, though she could not engage to follow it.

"Especially since it does not depend upon yourself, my dear. No one is blaming you; for, indeed, we all admire the steady, sensible way you go about your duties; and your devoted attendance to your poor mother is really quite admirable."

"Oh, Miss Perrott," said Ruth, "I don't promise to listen, if you talk in that way of what is my great happiness."

"I am not going to talk of you at all, Ruth. I have heard that people who do their duty conscientiously don't get themselves talked about; and I hope it is true, for I was never notorious in any way."

There was another pause, and Ruth checked a sigh of impatience at this long exordium. But Miss Perrott was coming to the point at last.

"Of course a young man like David — Mr. Lennox, as I ought to call him, but I think I shall wait till he is a captain — must amuse himself in his own way; but it seems imprudent for a girl of Isabel's age and beauty to go about so much with no one else to look after her — and she was always high-spirited and wilful. Riding over the country with Captain Gascoigne at her side is enough to give rise to reports, and some go so far as to say that there is to be a double marriage, and that everything is fixed, even to the wedding-day."

"The bridesmaids' dresses included?" added Ruth. "I hope that I am not expected to wear pink, for it does not suit my staid and sober character."

"If you turn everything into jest, I have done," said Miss Perrott; and though Ruth desired no other result, she again yielded to the necessity of restoring the old lady's equanimity.

"Really," she said, "it seems wiser to laugh at such idle gossip than to fret about it."

"If it is idle gossip; but there is generally some ground for these reports."

"Not in this instance, however; at least, if either David or Isabel have fixed their wedding-day, I have not been informed of it."

"It is very possible," said Miss Perrott, with asperity, "that many things go on of which you are not informed. Strangers often know more than those nearest home."

Ruth answered gravely, but with unruffled sweetness of temper —

"Sometimes it seems so, because those who are of one household learn the necessity of forbearance, instead of being ever ready to suspect and question what they see. I cannot see any real harm in Isabel's rides; and if there is no harm, I could not ask her to give up anything she so much enjoys. She never goes without David."

"They start together," said Miss Perrott; "but I happen to know that she and Capitain Gascoigne go scampering over the country, leaving the other two far behind. Mr. Dunn met them in the park a day or two ago. But I don't only object to the riding; it cannot be good for a girl of Isabel's age to be so much at Dyne Court, if all stories are true that we hear of Miss Gascoigne. Now, they say that she will not look at any one but David, and I only wonder that Sir John can countenance it."

"At all events," said Ruth, "our acquaintance with Clara Gascoigne is no new thing."

"No; but meeting here in a quiet way is very different from these constant visits to Dyne Court, considering that Miss Gascoigne is sadly wanting in discretion, and Sir John does not know how to guide her. I remember what Mr. Dunn said of her influence at the time of Jasper Clinton's affair."

Having thus delivered her testimony, Miss Perrott departed,

successful at all events in making Ruth thoroughly uncomfortable, though she had not extracted any interesting facts to impart to her circle of acquaintance. "But Ruth was," as she remarked, "so very reserved, that it was impossible to get anything out of her."

Shades of care gathered on Ruth's brow as soon as her visitor was gone. Miss Perrott had only put into words her own indefinite dissatisfaction, and she had attempted more than once to place some restriction on this frequent intercourse with Dyne Court; but it seemed to Isabel a sufficient answer that David wished her to go, or that Captain Gascoigne said that he should expect them. Ruth could make allowance for the absorbing nature of a first love, but the conviction that her sister's affections were engaged only increased her uneasiness. Captain Gascoigne's admiration was very openly expressed, but his manner was too easy and confident to convey the impression of any deeper sentiments; and she believed that Isabel would have confided to her any definite declaration of attachment, instead of shrinking, as now, from any explanation which might disturb her dream of happiness.

Then Ruth wondered how far she was justified in forbearing to appeal to her mother, but she decided as before, that she dared not run the risk of agitating her. Latterly Mrs. Lennox had been in such a suffering state, at one time rendered wholly indifferent to passing events by languor and exhaustion, at another thrown into nervous excitement by a trifle. She rejected also the alternative of speaking to David; her first conversation with him on the subject had not been sufficiently encouraging to incline her to repeat the attempt, and, besides, he was too much occupied with Clara to bestow a thought on others. And again Ruth sighed; she supposed that David must fall in and out of love like other young men, but she had no desire to witness the disappointment which must be the inevitable result of this attachment.

The conviction that she was in some sense responsible for the wrong which she was helpless to amend, was very oppressive, and it was as a satisfaction to her conscience that she resolved

to adopt the only remaining course of speaking herself to Isabel, although convinced that it would be as useless as it was painful.

Ruth had scarcely formed this resolution, when there was a clatter of horses' feet on the pavement, and she turned to the window in time to see Captain Gascoigne spring from his horse, and throw the rein to his groom, in order that he might assist Isabel to dismount. He detained her hand for a moment before she turned into the house, and when she entered the room, the rich glow which still mantled her cheeks might scarcely be accounted for by the fact of her having ridden fast through the evening air.

The flush was only deepened by Ruth's first question, "Where is David?" for Isabel understood the implied reproach.

"David dines at Dyne Court, and he and Clara chose to skirt the town to avoid the paved streets. I would not stay to dinner, for I wanted to know how mamma was."

"I am glad you have come home," said Ruth.

"You think I have been out too long? It was farther than we thought to Newton, and then Clara insisted that she was thirsty, and would stop to drink milk at the farm, and that delayed us. But you have not told me about mamma."

"She seemed ill and languid when I came down stairs. Miss Perrott has been here."

"Has she?" said Isabel, not much interested in the intelligence.

"It is unfortunate," continued Ruth, making a desperate effort to overcome her cowardice, "it is unfortunate that your ride through the town should follow so close on her visit, for it seems that there is much gossip about your proceedings."

Isabel was looking idly out of the window, but she turned round, her eyes flashing back scorn and defiance, "Who cares for Holmdale gossip?"

"I do, for one," said Ruth, quietly.

"Then you have changed, Ruth; for I remember that when people talked of you and Jasper, you said that it did not signify."

Ruth's brows contracted, as if with a sudden pang, yet she answered gently, "They spoke of the past, which could not be undone, and it would not have been wise or right to resent it. But when it is possible to avoid being talked about, we ought to do so."

"It is *not* possible in Holmdale. And pray what do these worthies say?"

"I don't wish to pain you, dear," said Ruth, twining her arm round Isabel, as she stood beside her with averted head. "You can guess what these reports are; and if there is no truth in them, is it not indiscreet to go so much to Dyne Court, and to ride so constantly with Captain Gascoigne?"

There was a brief pause, and perhaps Ruth's heart beat as violently as her sister's in the eagerness of suspense. Then Isabel said slowly —

"But what if they *are* true, Ruth? I am unworthy of his love; but if it is mine, is this scrupulous propriety to come between us?"

"It will be no barrier to one who really loves. If he has not yet declared, let him now openly declare his attachment."

"Say what you will, Ruth," said Isabel, while hot and angry tears started to her eyes, "you shall not make me doubt, for I *know* that he is true. But I could see how you have distrusted and misrepresented him from the first."

"I did not mean to do so, dear. I quite admit that he is clever and agreeable, and never more agreeable than when he is talking to you. But that is not all which is necessary."

"Because he is gay and pleasant, you think he is wicked! I am sure that he has never said anything to which even you could object. And there is no merit in parading principle."

"No; but it is easy to trace the true spring of action. And if this is wanting, dearest, what will the strongest love avail? But do not look so indignant, as if I was speaking against Captain Gascoigne, for I really don't know him well enough to judge."

"Because you are resolved not to know him. When he comes here, you are barely civil, and hardly ever speak to him."

"And whose fault is that, Isabel?" said Ruth, with a smile. "I only see him when you are by, and then he does not care to speak to me."

Isabel tried to smile also, but she was discomposed and agitated by the foregoing discussion, and the attempt ended in a flood of tears. She hastily left the room, while Ruth remained to torment herself by the conviction that she must have performed her ungracious office in a very ungracious manner. Mutual constraint was the only apparent result; and Isabel heaved a sigh of relief when tea was concluded and Ruth went up to her mother's room.

Isabel was in a desultory humour that evening, and she could settle neither to her work or her reading. At last she had recourse to the vellum book in which the incidents of her uneventful life were recorded, interspersed with fragments of poetry, original and selected; and the name of Gascoigne occurred sufficiently often in the later pages of the diary to give an interest to the perusal. Then she drew a chair into the window, and sat dreamily watching the harvest moon, and thinking to how much greater advantage she appeared in the colonnade at Dyne Court, where the dark masses of shadow thrown across the turf by the Scotch firs bore witness to her undisputed sovereignty, while here she carried on a faint and unsuccessful warfare with the flickering gas-lamps of the High-street. Isabel made some progress in an effusion, not quite adapted to the Spenserian stanza in which it was cast, which set forth the debasing effect of "sordid, grovelling cares" on the noblest and truest natures, with an indirect reference to Miss Perrott, Ruth, and Holmdale, although there might have been some difficulty in recognising the respective descriptions. She was mending the concluding lines when David passed the window with a quick step, and in another moment entered the room.

"All alone, Isabel?" he said. "How is mamma to-night?"

"Ruth thinks that she has settled well, and may have a better night; and she has gone to lie down herself, to try and get some sleep before Sarah goes to bed."

"So you have had a solitary evening, and might as well have stayed to dine at Dyne Court. You would have enjoyed the walk home — it is a lovely evening, and Miss Gascoigne and the Captain walked with me to the park gates."

"And the dinner was pleasant?"

"Very pleasant. Sir John went to sleep, and the Captain read the paper, and we talked. Miss Gascoigne will be here to-morrow to fix a day for this joint visit to the Wentworths. Lady Maria has written to name Saturday, and if it suited Sir John, he was to forward this scented envelope to you. Sir John will not go himself, but Miss Gascoigne is quite keen about it, and she says the barouche will convey us all. It is about thirteen miles from here."

"It is a very cordial note," said Isabel, giving the note to her brother, "and I dare say it would be pleasant."

"Or, rather, that it *will* be pleasant. Why should you speak in the conditional?"

"Because I don't think I ought to go," said Isabel, in an unsteady voice, while the tears were again ready to start. "Ruth says that I have been going about too much — riding, and that sort of thing."

"You silly child," said David; "Ruth must not make you as great a prude as herself. Besides, if it is the riding to which she objects, I can set your mind at rest, for I happen to know that there are no riding-horses at the Lodge."

"And I don't know that it would be right to go while mamma is so ill," continued Isabel.

David was still less disposed to accept this objection; perhaps because he felt that it must apply in a certain degree to himself. "It seems," he said, "that you have employed your solitude in conjuring up fanciful evils. I asked Ball about my mother to-day, and he disclaimed any cause for uneasiness. He says she is only suffering from the low nervous fever which attacks her every autumn, very distressing to see, but not at all alarming. Besides, you are never with her, and I don't know what filial duty you fulfil by sitting here alone."

"Well," said Isabel, "we must consult Ruth to-morrow."

"You may consult her if you please, though I don't promise to abide by her decision, for I am at least equally competent to decide what is fitting; and Miss Gascoigne takes for granted that we shall go."

"Ah, David!" said Isabel, with a sunshiny smile, "there is *your* attraction."

"What, then? I care not who knows it," rejoined David; but his quick nervous tone, and the colour which flew into his face, did not entirely bear out his words. "You cannot deny its force."

"No," said Isabel, now grave enough, for it is easy to be prudent for other people; and she was ready to hand on some of the good advice which she had rejected on her own account. "In its force the danger lies; for I suppose there is no one more irresistible than Clara when she wishes to please."

David bit his lip, impatient of the inference. "That is unworthy of you, Isabel; neither you nor I have any cause to accuse Miss Gascoigne of caprice; but I begin to believe the severe things which are said of one woman's inclination to depreciate another."

"Not really, David?" said Isabel, extending a timid hand to detain him when he would have turned away; and when he met her full, earnest gaze he instantly relented.

"No, not really; at least, I will not believe there is such littleness of mind in you. If I thought that you would listen patiently, and without misconstruction."

"You may trust me, David," said his sister; and he required no further assurance.

"I would trust none other. To all but you such a confession would appear a presumptuous dream. I love Clara Gascoigne, and I sometimes hope that my love is not unrequited. Those have accused her of idle coquetry who never wakened the springs of true, earnest feeling, which it may be mine to win, to cherish, and repay with the devotion of my whole heart."

"But even then," said Isabel, slowly.

"I know what you would say. You need not remind me that I have nothing else to offer, — that it will not, in the world's

estimation, supply the lack of name, of land, and riches. But I care not, if she is satisfied. We are both young, and life is before us; and with such a guiding star I must achieve success, and break down the miserable barrier between us."

There was a fire in his eye, and a proud confidence in his tone, which did not animate Isabel; and he added, with some bitterness —

"You doubt it, Isabel. You think my hopes visionary and impracticable."

Isabel was forced to reply; and there was, perhaps; a little cowardice in transferring the odium of the sentiment to another.

"Ruth, who knows Clara so much better than I do, says that she has been too much spoiled by admiration to love in earnest, until she meets with one who is insensible to her attractions."

"You have no cause to say so, Isabel," said her brother. "At least I imagine that you allow Evelyn Gascoigne is agreeable; and if she were the coquette you wish me to believe her, she might have sought to detach him from a pursuit which he finds sufficiently engrossing to blind him even to his cousin's charms. I must repeat that she has only trifled with idle admiration, because she never knew the true, deep, disinterested love which is now her portion."

"Lord Edward's love was true," said Isabel.

"Lord Edward! Was it possible that his cold, ceremonious attentions should be the source of anything but annoyance? His temper is wholly uncongenial, and you cannot accuse her of encouraging his hopeless passion."

Isabel would not reply that Lord Edward's day of encouragement was past, at the risk of being again reproached with prejudice. And her misgivings were almost forgotten when David poured forth his glowing tale of hopes and fears, and admiration ripening into love, in which the last few weeks had flitted by like a feverish dream. She would no longer believe that Clara was trifling with the deep and earnest love of which she was the object.

But in the solitude of her own room, when Isabel thought over all that had passed, the conviction revived that Clara was only actuated by the heartless coquetry inherent to her nature, and she sighed and felt that, if Ruth knew all, she would deem the visit to Wentworth Lodge more inexpedient than ever. And her heart was very full; for even now, when David had imparted to her, and to her alone, his cherished hopes, she learned the change in their relations. To him, as to her, a new and absorbing interest had arisen to sever the bond which had in earlier days rendered the brother and sister all in all to each other. Towards that happy childhood Isabel now reverted with a strange yearning, feeling that its simplicity and truthfulness were gone by for ever, and her spirit quailed before the unknown joys, as well as the trials in store for them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

O heart of grace, that, like the lowly flowers,
Bendest beneath the storms, but does not break,
Whom in thy tears kind thoughts do not forsake,
As blessed odours live on thunder-showers:
Whether the sun shines forth, or tempest lowers,
Thou art unshaken — in thy utmost need,
While iron pride is shattered like a reed,
Thy winged hopes fly onward with the hours.

F. TENNYSON.

THERE was a tacit agreement on the part of the brother and sisters, when they met at the breakfast-table on the following morning, to put aside the several explanations of the foregoing evening as completely as though they had never been. Ruth was in good spirits; for, although Mr. Ball's sanguine view of her mother's state had failed to reassure her, the decided improvement this morning went far to allay her uneasiness.

"Mamma seems," she told David, "more like herself than she has been for long — quite vigorous and cheerful."

David expressed his satisfaction, and felt that there could be a better opportunity for broaching the subject of their visit to

Wentworth Lodge. He chose to assume that the invitation must be accepted, while Isabel raised her eyes with a timid and deprecating glance towards her sister. But it appeared that her perturbation might have been spared, for Ruth quietly assented, perhaps because she felt that opposition would have the effect of destroying Isabel's pleasure, without inducing her to relinquish the visit. Besides, she considered that Evelyn Gascoigne would be more on his guard under Lady Maria's roof than at Dyne Court; and that his attentions would become less marked in general society, if they were only due to his desire to carry on an idle flirtation. And so Isabel's eyes might be opened; but here Ruth checked herself, unwilling to dwell on the cruel bitterness of such an awakening. Little as she desired Evelyn Gascoigne to be her brother-in-law, she felt that Isabel's happiness was so deeply involved, that she dared not contemplate the wreck of all her hopes.

Mrs. Lennox was pleased with the invitation, for this unsought introduction to the county society gratified her maternal pride.

"I never saw Lady Maria myself," she said; "but I always heard that she is particularly pleasant with young people; and I imagine the Lodge keeps up the reputation it had in old Mr. Wentworth's time, of being better *monté* than any house in the county. It will be a pleasant variety for David. The invitation is only to him and Isabel."

"I am not affronted," Ruth answered, with a smile. "I don't suppose that Lady Maria is aware of my existence."

"I did not think of being affronted," said Mrs. Lennox; "but it does vex me to think how completely you are shut out from the amusement and society which you ought to enjoy."

"I should *not* enjoy them if they came in my way," said Ruth, with the playful decision with which she ever silenced such regrets; "and so it is well for me that I have home duties. But I project a dissipation for the afternoon, in the shape of a drive with Clara, if you can really spare me."

Mrs. Lennox readily assented; and she would not suffer Isabel to stay at home in her sister's place, as Isabel was urgent

to be allowed to do, since she was desirous to prove her resolution in foregoing a whole afternoon of Captain Gascoigne's society. And Ruth was glad that her intention was overruled, since her motive in joining the party was to see Evelyn and her sister together.

It did not seem, however, that she was to have the opportunity for personal observations, since a quiet strife between the two gentlemen, as to who should occupy the fourth place inside the barouche, ended in David's favour; and Captain Gascoigne had not much intercourse with his companions from his elevated seat on the box. Isabel leaned back, rather silent and abstracted; but Clara was full of animation, and made much of Ruth, who had latterly been in such close attendance on her mother, that her release for the afternoon was quite an event.

Ruth was desired to choose the object of their drive, and she decided in favour of Beverly Grange. Many a long summer's holiday had been spent there in former days; and now that the distance exceeded her powers of walking, she was glad to take this opportunity of renewing old associations. The carriage set them down at the entrance to the long green lane to which Sir John's coachman did not choose to trust the springs of his barouche, although tradition said that it had once been considered passable for the Beverly coach and six. And they were all well pleased to walk, although David thought that his fraternal affection was put to a rather severe test, when Clara insisted that he should give his arm to Ruth, while she tripped daintily by their side. From her cousin she neither asked nor expected help, and he stopped so often to strip the hazel bushes of their ripe clusters, that he and Isabel were soon left behind.

"Do you remember, David," said Ruth, "our coming home along this lane so tired and hungry, because you had insisted on our starting without provisions, in order that we might dine on the fish you were to catch in the moat?"

"Which proved to be three minnows and a gudgeon," said David, laughing; "and we had no means of cooking them, for the farm people had locked up the house, and all turned out to

make hay. I wanted to break into the dairy, but, as usual, your conscience and Clinton's were too mighty for me."

"Was Mr. Clinton's conscience so tender?" said Clara, innocently; and she really was unconscious, probably because her own memory in such matters was not particularly retentive, how that allusion made Ruth inwardly shrink and shiver. Yet she gave no outward sign of emotion, save a slight compression of the firm, pale lips, and she had steadied the hand which rested on her brother's arm before he discovered how it trembled in his grasp.

David was in love, and therefore he could not wish one word unsaid which fell from Clara's lips; yet he was conscious that the remark jarred upon him, and he said quickly, "Jasper Clinton was thoroughly true-hearted, and I often find, on looking back, that I owe to him the few fixed principles I have."

"I don't quite understand," said Clara, lightly, "whether Mr. Clinton was a warning or an example; if the latter, I am afraid you must be a very unprincipled character."

Ruth's head was turned away, or Clara might have been checked by the expression of her face; as it was, she was startled by the tone of tremulous earnestness in which she replied —

"Oh Clara! cannot you spare the past, in memory of those short, bright days we must know no more!"

"I did not think — I did not mean to vex you," replied Clara. "Now show that you forgive me by telling more about those happy days; of all the scrapes which Mr. Lennox got into, and Mr. Clinton helped him out of."

In David's opinion the ready grace of the apology atoned for the thoughtlessness which had rendered it necessary, and he willingly supplied the reminiscences which from Ruth's lips were few and scanty. He pointed out the various attractions which the place possessed for boys; the rookery, the ruined keep, and the green and slimy moat.

Captain Gascoigne and Isabel sauntered on, talking not of the past, but of the future. Isabel had collected a store of traditions concerning the ruins which she would have liked to impart to another companion, but she had discovered that Evelyn

took little interest in such researches; and, besides, she was best pleased to hear, and not to speak, when he was by. Evelyn had a taste for landscape gardening, and he was struck by the capabilities of the Grange for becoming once more a manor-house.

"I should repair the keep," he said, "though I don't promise to inhabit it, for it may be difficult to dislodge the rats, the bats, and the owls. But the farm, with its picturesque out-buildings, might easily be converted into a dwelling-house, and you may trace the old approach by that irregular line of Spanish chest-nuts stretching over the two fields. The turf must be mown and levelled, and the moat drained."

"Oh! you will not fill in the moat," said Isabel, pleadingly.

"You have a sentiment for the moat? Well, then, we must reserve that improvement until the age of rheumatism succeeds to that of romance. And where will you put the flower-garden?"

Isabel did not know, she said; it was one of those dubious speeches which destroyed her self-possession, making her heart flutter and her cheek crimson, while she wondered what Captain Gascoigne meant, and what Ruth would think if she had heard him. For he had begun by saying that he should be content to settle in such a place as Beverly Grange, old and picturesque as it was, and with scope for improvements which would give him plenty of occupation. And in these improvements he persisted in giving her an interest and a voice, almost implying by that pronoun "we" that they must act together.

On their return, Captain Gascoigne was inside the carriage, and as he and Isabel sat side by side, and opposite to Ruth, she could observe them to her heart's content, or discontent. For she could not fail to observe the contrast between the two faces; that of Isabel was so transparent in its varying emotions, whether downcast in bashful happiness, or, forgetting herself and her embarrassment, she turned her full earnest gaze towards Evelyn, in eager attention to all which fell from his lips. Evelyn's countenance expressed intellect, sense, quickness of perception, but beyond this, it was a riddle which Ruth

could not read. And there was something premature in his tone of worldly wisdom, and his cool, well-balanced judgments, while there was little of the frank gaiety of youth in the smile so often on his lips. On the whole, the prejudice with which Isabel accused her sister of regarding Captain Gascoigne, was not dissipated during the drive home from Beverly Grange.

David declared that it was too fine to go into the house, and he made Isabel go down to the river side with him, while Ruth went straight to her mother's room.

"You are home early," said Mrs. Lennox; and Ruth was grieved by the nervous quickness of her voice.

"Not earlier than I intended, mamma; and I am afraid that I have been too long away. You have been tiring yourself, I am sure."

"I am rather tired, dear. Dr. Berkeley paid me a long visit."

"And you were not at all fit to see any one," said Ruth, reproachfully; "the Doctor ought to have known better, and so I shall tell him."

"Ah, Ruth!" said her mother, and there she paused.

"Well, mamma, you need not think me unjust to the Doctor. I know that he does not mean to be inconsiderate, but he really does abuse the privilege of a scholar and a single man in his absence of mind. However, we will not talk of him now, or of anything else, for you ought to rest."

"I cannot rest," said Mrs. Lennox, "until I have told the purport of the Doctor's visit; unless you can guess, Ruth, how nearly it concerns yourself."

The colour flew into Ruth's face, but her answer betrayed her annoyance rather than embarrassment.

"Oh mamma! I have once or twice had a horrible suspicion that he had something in his head, but I always put it aside as simply impossible. He must know, must feel, how impossible it is that he should ever be more than a friend."

"He has felt it, Ruth, and that conviction has sealed his lips so long, and now restrains him from pleading his own cause. I said something of my confidence that his friendship

and advice would be your chief stay when I am gone, and that drew forth the confession that he had loved, and loved hopelessly, for years."

"Hopelessly," repeated Ruth; "and surely, mamma, you did not bid him hope?"

"At least I thought that he need not despair until he heard his fate from your own lips. But there is no need to decide hastily."

"No time could alter my decision. Such love as we may carry from the cradle to the grave is yours, dearest mother, and I shall know no other."

"So others have said, dear, who yet have learned to love and be loved most intensely. And surely Dr. Berkeley's earnest, single-hearted affection merits some return."

"One cannot reason about these things," said Ruth, with a slight shade of impatience in her voice, then melting into tender reproach. "And, oh mamma, what have I done, that you should wish to drive me from you?"

"Nothing shall part us but death, my sweet one," said her mother, folding her in her arms; "and it is the thought of that parting which makes death bitter. David and Isabel have youth and spirits to cope with all trials, and the strong bond of their mutual love to lighten them, but you are isolated by your devotion to me, and your nerves are shaken and your spirits crushed."

"But not by the little I have been able to do for you, mamma. Indeed, that has been my great stay when other things pressed heavily."

"Ah, Ruth!" said Mrs. Lennox, sadly, "do you still suffer that young and fleeting fancy to dwell in your recollection?"

"Despise me, if you will," said Ruth, hiding her face in an agony of shame; "yet not so bitter as I despise myself. The suspense makes it so hard to forget. I should be satisfied to hear but once of his welfare, or to know that one day his honour will be made clear to others as to me."

"And even then, Ruth, do you think of the change these years must have wrought? In the roving life of toil and hard-

ships which must be Jasper's lot, it is little likely that early associations retain their hold on his memory."

"He has nothing to remember; at least," Ruth added, blushing, "he confided in me as a brother might; and, if he has not forgotten our place and name, he still thinks of me as a sister."

"And, as a brother, therefore, he would rejoice to know that there is one at hand to care for you when I am gone; to devote to you the energies of a strong and tender heart. Jasper would be the first to urge that such love ought not to be lightly rejected."

Ruth had borne much, but to have it supposed that Jasper would plead the cause of another was beyond her powers of endurance. Cowering down, so as to escape the light touch of her mother's fingers, which seemed to weigh like lead on her beating temples, she said, in a low, half stifled voice, "What Jasper might urge we do not know — we never shall know. Enough to tell me what *you* wish."

"Dear child," said Mrs. Lennox, tenderly, "I should be the last to urge you to take any step from which you recoil. Only do not decide hastily. Dr. Berkeley will wait with patience, as he has waited for years. And may I not tell him this much, that, though you cannot now requite his love, the time may come?"

"If you will, mamma; but he must not press it. He must not speak to me now — I could not bear it."

And Ruth knew not how much the words so reluctantly wrung from her implied, until the pledge was sealed by her mother's long, grateful kiss. Then her heart sank, but it was too late to draw back, and she felt that no sacrifice was too great which had chased the expression of disquietude from those pinched and sharpened features. At that moment Ruth could not think of her own future, nor of anything but the foreboding which found an echo in her heart, and she asked anxiously, "Mamma, do you feel worse to-night?"

"Much better, dear, since that point is settled; but I must not talk any more to-night, and you had better go down to tea before Isabel comes to seek you."

Ruth left the room; but she did not go down at once, for she wished to be alone, to try and collect her thoughts. But she could not think — she could scarcely feel; there was a dull, bewildered sense of pain, and that was all. Her mother's last words had failed to reassure her, and though there was no definite cause for the belief, she felt certain that before the pale moon, now rising in the twilight sky, had waned and waxed again, her long watches by her mother's bedside would be ended — the wasting sickness would have done its work, and be exchanged for the stillness of death. Beyond that present and crushing grief Ruth would not look; but words, not of her own seeking, came into her mind, and were murmured through her parched lips: — "Casting all your care upon the Lord, for He careth for you." And, according to the promise, remembering these everlasting judgments, she "received comfort."

CHAPTER XXIV.

These Border Lands are calm and still.
And solemn are their silent shades
And my heart welcomes them until
The light of life's long evening fades.

ON the day fixed for the visit to Wentworth Lodge, and not much after the appointed hour, Clara drove into Holmdale to take up David and Isabel. And although they were in readiness, Clara chose to alight and see Ruth, while her cousin remained to superintend the arrangement of the boxes. Ruth had taken leave of her brother and sister up-stairs; but she did not regret being summoned down, for it was worth while to see Clara looking so unusually bright and pretty, in the smallest and most transparent of summer bonnets, a gossamer dress and gay-coloured mantle. The contrast between the rival beauties was marked as ever, for Isabel conceived that the sharp wind of this September afternoon entitled her to discard summer guise, and she looked best in dark colours; and never better than when, as now, she wore her long cloak of Carmelite grey, and

of texture so soft and fine as to fall in clinging folds round her tall and pliant form.

"Oh, Ruth!" said Clara, as she entered the room, "I could not go without receiving your last instructions; for since Mr. Lennox and Isabel go, as it were, under my wing, I shall feel responsible for their behaviour, and I am ready to attend to any hints on the subject."

"If I did not know that any hint would be thrown away, Clara, I might say that example is better than precept."

"I understand; and hereby exhort Mr. Lennox and Isabel to make me their pattern in every particular. There is no danger now that they will eat with their knives, or *ride* in a carriage, or transgress any other laws of society."

"Ah! Clara," said Ruth, with a smile, which was, however, grave and unwilling. "Do you transgress no other laws?"

Clara was only excited by her success in rousing something of the old spirit which used to lead Ruth to lecture and rebuke her; but David was quite on the defensive.

"Ruth," he said, "always takes refuge in generalities."

"Generalities," repeated his sister; "I was afraid that Clara might think me only too personal."

"So you are in one sense," said Clara; "but I quite agree with Mr. Lennox touching your reserve ever since this visit to Wentworth Lodge was proposed. I have seen that you disliked the idea without being able to extract the reason."

"It was not likely that you would attend to my reasons," said Ruth.

"Still you might have given me the option. But you never tell me now what you think or care about."

"As one grows old, one does not care about so many things; or sometimes I care so much, that I don't care to say anything which you would take hold of to torment and worry, as a kitten does a ball."

"In that case we had better become monks of La Chartreuse at once," said Clara.

"There must be some listeners in the world, as well as speakers," answered Ruth, smiling a little at the inaptitude

expressed by every fold and flutter of Clara's gay dress for such a vocation; "and I believe that the first are almost as useful members of society as the last."

"But, Ruth," said Isabel, coming up to her, "I need not go even now, if you think I had better not."

"It is only one of Clara's fancies," said Ruth; "mamma would be quite disappointed if you gave up the visit; and she seems better this afternoon."

"So that is your reason for looking grave," said Clara. "Mrs. Lennox has been worse."

"Only not better," Ruth answered; "this has been such a long, wearing attack."

"Wearing to others as well as to herself," said Clara. "Mr. Lennox tells me — and I can quite believe it — that you are growing nervous and dispirited from want of sleep, and I have a great mind to stay and enliven you — no one will miss me at the Lodge."

"Not I," said David, promptly, as she glanced towards him, "for I shall certainly stay at home too."

"In that case there would be no one but the Captain to chaperon Isabel, which would not be quite correct, would it, Ruth?" said Clara.

Ruth was spared the necessity of devising such a reply as might cover her sister's confusion, by the entrance of the Captain himself, to announce that the carriage was ready; and he was next attacked by his lively cousin.

"Well, Evelyn, you find us all disputing for the honour of sharing Ruth's seclusion. Will you not make the same magnanimous offer?"

"If I had any hope that it would be acceptable," replied Evelyn, coolly.

Ruth understood the allusion to the want of cordiality, which had from the first marked their intercourse; but, while Isabel looked disconcerted and unhappy, she only said, "It really is not fair to keep the horses standing, when they have such a long drive before them."

"A polite hint that you have had enough of our company,"

said Clara, laughing; "and you-are quite content to be left alone?"

"I cannot think what you mean by my being alone, when I have mamma," said Ruth.

"Good-bye, dear Ruth," said Isabel, returning her fond, though hurried embrace. "You will write a line about mamma to-morrow, and we shall be home by three on Tuesday."

She sprang into the carriage, followed by Clara, who continued to kiss and wave her hand as long as she could catch a glimpse of Ruth's figure on the doorstep. And Ruth stood there until the carriage was out of sight, and then turned slowly into the house.

Dr. Berkeley had not been to the Red House since the memorable afternoon when he had found courage to confess his love to Mrs. Lennox; but she had written to inform him of Ruth's unwilling consent to refrain from absolutely rejecting his suit; and the tone of his brief reply made Ruth fear that this concession had been expressed in terms which drew their colouring from her mother's own wishes. They had not met since; and although nervously shrinking from the inevitable explanation, Ruth saw the necessity of submitting to it, rather than to suffer the hopes to which Mrs. Lennox's letter had given rise to gather strength. She imagined that the Doctor might avail himself of the absence of her brother and sister; and as Mrs. Lennox was best pleased to be alone, she resolutely sat down-stairs for the greater part of the evening. Her colour went and came at every footfall on the pavement, but her solitude was undisturbed; and Ruth could not guess who it was who passed and repassed so frequently, watching the single shadow cast upon the window-blind by the small bright lamp, without finding courage to enter. "To-morrow," thought Dr. Berkeley, when at last he returned, chilled and weary, to his own house. "To-morrow we must, as usual, walk home from church together, and then I must say one word to satisfy myself that she is not offended by my presumption, and to assure her that I shall be silent until she bids me speak."

On the morrow, however, Ruth was missing from her ac-

customed place in church; and on inquiring at the Red House, after the morning service, Dr. Berkeley learned that Miss Lennox had been up all night with her mother, and had now gone to lie down. "I can tell her that you are here," said Sally, believing that Ruth might be cheered by the face of a friend; but the Doctor was of a different opinion, and he only left a message to entreat that Miss Lennox would send for him if he could be of any use. As she lay in her own room, Ruth heard the colloquy on the stairs, and recognised the Doctor's voice. In child-like obedience to her mother's wishes, she had closed the shutters, and lain down to try and sleep, only to become more painfully alive to the fluttering of her heart, and the restless quivering of every nerve. In the sick room, when her mother's attacks of exhaustion were most alarming, she could minister to her needs with thoughtful tenderness, never suffering her hand to tremble nor her voice to falter; but the reaction came as soon as the strain was relaxed.

That long and anxious night had justified her forebodings, and although Mr. Ball, for whom she sent at an early hour of the morning, continued to speak sanguinely, she fancied that his tone was changed, and that he only wished to maintain his consistency and to calm her fears. Still he would not sanction her desire to recall David and Isabel, and she did not like to act on her own responsibility, since it might only alarm them unnecessarily, and agitate Mrs. Lennox. She contented herself with a brief account of her mother's increasing weakness in her letter to Isabel, believing that it must convey to them an impression of the anxiety which she did not openly declare.

Mrs. Lennox rallied as the day went on, although she was little inclined to speak, and the few words she said argued the same conviction as before, that the end was near. Therefore, when she asked whether David and Isabel were to return on the following day, or on Tuesday, Ruth felt justified in framing her answer so as to relieve her own intolerable weight of care.

"Not till Tuesday, mamma; but it would be easy to summon them home if you wished it."

"No," said Mrs. Lennox; "there is no need to shorten the last holiday-making they will have for some time. Tuesday will be soon enough, though not too soon."

Tuesday came, and Dr. Berkeley was among the first to call at the Red House that day, for a report of Mr. Ball's altered opinion had spread through the town, and it was said that he admitted Mrs. Lennox's prostration of strength to be very alarming. "Her might was very bad," Sally said, in answer to his inquiries, "but Miss Lennox will tell you herself, for she wished to see you when you came."

Dr. Berkeley had little time to recover his composure or to lose it, as the case might be, before Ruth appeared. *She* was perfectly calm in voice and manner; the firm, pale lips did not falter, and her eyes were glazed and tearless. But Dr. Berkeley thought, as he looked at her, of the poet's lines: —

'And in my heart, if calm at all,
If any calm, a calm despair.'

"You are not fit to be alone, Miss Lennox," he said; "you should have sent for me, if I could have been of the slightest use or comfort."

"It was only this morning that I wished to see you. I have written to Mr. Smith to ask him to come at three to administer the Holy Communion. David and Isabel will have returned, but mamma — we both — wish that you should be there also."

"I will come," said Dr. Berkeley; and he was unable to say more.

"If they leave the Lodge directly after breakfast," continued Ruth, "they should be here at twelve. It is grievous to think how unprepared they both are, and poor Isabel especially will take it so much to heart that she should have been away at this time."

"It is more grievous on your account that you have been left to bear such a charge alone. Surely, Miss Lennox," and Dr. Berkeley spoke with a hesitation which seemed to deprecate the idea that he had the slightest claim to such a privilege, "surely you will permit me to remain in the house. I must just

go back to make arrangements with Harrison for my class, but I will return at once."

"If it is not inconvenient," said Ruth; and Dr. Berkeley looked pained by the reply.

"Can you suppose," he said, "that I should suffer any inconvenience to come between us?"

Then for the first time Ruth remembered the position in which he stood, and felt inclined to retract the permission of which he was so eager to avail himself. But she knew how deeply a refusal would wound him, and she really felt the need of some stronger mind on which to rely. So the Doctor was presently established in the drawing-room to occupy himself in replying to the notes and messages which poured in. "It is woman's work," Ruth said, with a faint smile, "but I must leave it all to you. I can do little for *her* now, yet I have a selfish longing to be with her — the time is so short."

"Go now," said Dr. Berkeley, as she lingered for a moment to provide him with pens and paper; "I can find everything."

One, two o'clock came, but David and Isabel had not returned. More than once Mrs. Lennox awoke with a start from a few moments' uneasy sleep, and asked faintly, "Have they come?"

And still Ruth made the same reply, with a failing heart, "Not yet, mamma, but they must come soon."

"Poor children!" Mrs. Lennox murmured, as she sank back on her pillows. "It will not do to wait for them, Ruth, I am so faint and spent. Will Mr. Smith come soon?"

Ruth left Sally with her mother, and went down to Dr. Berkeley.

"Is there any change?" he asked, shocked by the face of ashy paleness which met his eyes. And as Ruth wrung her hands in uncontrollable anguish without finding voice to speak, he asked again, "Shall I go for Ball?"

"No, it would be of no use; she said so herself," answered Ruth, the words escaping with difficulty through her set teeth,

and Dr. Berkeley was almost more agitated than herself, even while he attempted to soothe her.

"Miss Lennox — dear Ruth, be patient, be calm. You have borne all so nobly until now, even while looking forward to this end."

"It is not *that*," said Ruth. "She is going fast; and even now she is entering into that perfect peace of which we who are left behind can never taste: but she had one earthly hope remaining — to see David and Isabel again, and it is not to be. Oh, if I had but sent!"

"They may still be in time," said Dr. Berkeley; and Ruth only shook her head. She rightly guessed that they had been persuaded to defer their return until the following day.

Mr. Smith came, and with him and Dr. Berkeley Ruth returned to the chamber of death. For that life was fleeting fast none now could doubt, who marked the sharpened features, so full of peace and spiritual beauty. At the beginning of the service the mother cast one wistful glance around, as if in search of her absent children; but when her eyes fell on the figure kneeling beside Ruth she seemed satisfied, and Dr. Berkeley rightly interpreted her confidence that she might safely commit her dearest earthly treasure to his keeping. And then all earthly care was laid aside, and to her, and to those who were joined in that communion, but one thought was present, — the participation of that Life over which death has no power.

CHAPTER XXV.

Where faces are hueless, where eyelids are dewless
Where passion is silent, and hearts never crave,
Where thought hath no theme, and where sleep hath no dream,
In patience and peace thou art gone — to thy grave!

GEORGE MEREDITH.

A gay party was gathered round the dinner-table at Wentworth Lodge that evening, and few were gayer than David Lennox. Clara had never appeared more fascinating, or distin-

guished him with more marked favour. She had scarcely a word to bestow on her cousin Evelyn, who sat on her other side, and he was forced to solace himself by becoming particularly agreeable to Lady Maria.

Isabel was less happily placed between Lord Raeburn and Lord Edward; and in order to escape from the unwelcome attentions of the former, she embarked in a political discussion, in which, however, she did not betray any lively interest. But it would be unjust to ascribe her pre-occupied manner to her position at the dinner-table, for she was dissatisfied and ill at ease, reproaching herself for not having insisted on their departure that afternoon. In reality, the decision had not rested with her; Lady Maria had urged them not to be the first to break up the party, David ruled that it must be as Miss Gascoigne chose, and Miss Gascoigne chose to stay. Isabel had proposed to return home without her, but her brother refused to listen to the suggestion, and took some pains to construe Ruth's report into a good account. And Isabel was forced to silence her misgivings, and to console herself with the thought that one day could make little difference.

They had not long sat down to dinner when a message was brought in to David, that there was a person wishing to speak to him.

"Who is it?" David asked; and the servant replied that "the gentleman did not give his name."

"A mysterious stranger," said Clara, lightly. David laughed, and bade the servant say that he would come directly.

Although Isabel only heard imperfectly what was passing, a foreboding of the truth sent a chill to her heart, and she looked imploringly at her brother; but he had turned again to Clara, and their eyes did not meet. Isabel's chair was close to the door opening into the entrance-hall, and in a lull of conversation the tones of a voice she could not mistake reached her ears: "Have you sent in my message to Mr. Lennox?" A stifled cry broke from her: "It is the Doctor!" she said, leaning

forward to arrest her brother's attention, and she left the room, almost instantly followed by David.

"I see you guess the truth," said Dr. Berkeley; "I have come to summon you home. We waited, expecting you to come."

"And now it is too late," said Isabel.

"I trust not; Mrs. Lennox is sinking fast, but she was still conscious when I left." The Doctor was not disposed to suppress or soften the truth, for his sympathies were all with her who was left to watch alone in the chamber of death. "Where is your cloak?" he continued; "every moment is precious, and the fly is waiting to take us back at once."

There was relief in immediate action. David threw a cloak about his sister, and bade her follow the Doctor, while he hurried back to the dining-room to explain the cause of their departure to the party which sat there in constrained silence. To Clara, and not to Lady Maria, David instinctively addressed himself. "You must make our excuses," he said, in a low, hurried voice; "my mother is very ill, and we must go at once. God grant it may not be too late!"

"And it was I who kept you," said Clara, with real feeling; "and poor Ruth is alone. Make haste back to comfort and take care of her." David took, and for a moment detained her hand, and then he hurried away, without bestowing a look or thought on the rest of the party.

It was a long, dreary drive. The horses were tired; and although Dr. Berkeley had ordered a fresh pair to be in readiness at Lapton, the town through which they must pass, some time was lost in changing, and the night was dark and roads bad. Cowering down, with her face buried in her hands, Isabel was utterly unable to speak, and less conscious of the lapse of time than David, who, in his restless agitation, only retarded progress by putting his head out of window to entreat the driver to make haste, to ask how far they had gone, and if the man was sure of his road. The Doctor leaned back in his corner, almost as silent as Isabel, yet roused to answer David when he said that Ruth should have sent for them last night.

"You seem to forget," he said, "that you were expected at home some hours ago."

Isabel shivered, and David drew her to his side and whispered soothing words! "Be patient, dearest; we shall be there soon."

Not soon, yet at length the vehicle rolled into the dimly-lighted High-street, and stopped at the door of the Red House. Before the carriage drew up, David was on the pavement; and at the same moment the door was opened by Sally, who hastened to impart the information he dared not ask.

"Thank God, Mr. David, you are in time. Miss Lennox heard the wheels and sent me down; and *she* was asking for you not long since."

"Thank God," David repeated. He lifted Isabel from the carriage, who clung to him helplessly for support, and led her into the house. The light fell upon her drooping form, and her gay evening dress seemed sadly out of keeping with the expression of stupified misery, which robbed her face of all its wonted beauty; but it was not a time to think of these things, and without a moment's delay the brother and sister ascended the stair together. The door of their mother's room stood open; and the low, thrilling tones of Ruth's voice met the ear —

"'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me, Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me.'"

Struggling for that "breath of life" which the Lord God was now recalling to Himself, Mrs. Lennox sat, supported by Ruth's encircling arm. And Ruth looked up with a strange and quiet smile, reflecting the holy calm of her mother's countenance, although she could not, without a pang, disturb that heavenly peace by recalling the departing spirit to the consciousness of the ties so nearly severed.

"Mamma," she said, "they are come. David and Isabel are here. Will you not look up and speak to them?"

It seemed that the words fell on an unheeding ear; and David repeated with passionate earnestness —

"Mother, we are here. Say but one word of farewell and blessing."

This time the appeal was not made in vain. The power of speech was gone, but the mother turned upon her son a look of unspeakable love and tenderness; and while he pressed one cold hand to his lips, the other sought Isabel's head, who had thrown herself on her knees beside the bed.

It was the last effort. There was another gasping sigh, a few more palpitations of the fluttering heart, and then all was still, and the lifeless form alone was clasped by Ruth's upholding arm. Gently, as a mother might lay her child to sleep, she placed the hanging head on the pillow: reverently she closed the eyes, and kissed the brow of the dead.

Not yet might she cease from ministrations of love. To lead Isabel from the room, and to still her hysterical sobs, was an easier task than to appease the vehement self-upbraidings which followed. Isabel tore down with a sort of loathing the crushed and faded blossoms of scarlet geranium which still decked her hair, and trampled them under her feet.

"In these miserable vanities I took delight," she said, "while you watched and waited, and *she* asked why we did not come."

"She saw and knew you. Her last earthly thought was yours and David's," said Ruth, gently.

But the bitterness of Isabel's remorse turned all to gall.

"You do well to grudge it to us, Ruth; that last look should have been yours."

"Dear Isabel," said Ruth, "you must not say such cruel words. There was love enough for all — such love as we shall never know again; but its memory will serve to bind us closer to each other. And if you think of all her sufferings, of the long hours of sleepless pain and weariness, and then of that smile which told how she entered into her rest, you will thank God with me that He gave her to us for so long, and that He has now taken her to Himself."

"I must tell you all, Ruth," said her sister; "and then you will understand how even these thoughts can bring no comfort. I shall never forgive myself for not giving up this visit. I wished

to go, and so refused to see how anxious you were, and chose to believe what David said, who was really deceived by Mr. Ball's opinion."

"You went to please David rather than yourself," said Ruth; "and you must not embitter his grief by dwelling too much on the loss of these few days. We must all feel how imperfectly we loved her, and how little we prized the blessing as we might have done—as we should do now, if life could be lived over again."

"You have no cause to feel this, Ruth."

"You little know," said Ruth. "But we must take this as part of the trial, dear, and be patient."

Ruth's self-command did not desert her throughout the ensuing week, although there was much to try her, and especially in her intercourse with David. His grief was genuine and touching; for he had loved his mother fondly, and he so little contemplated such an end of her lingering illness, that her death came to him as a sudden shock. But he was of an age when men scarcely know what to do with grief. Unable to control it, and yet ashamed of its expression, he often took refuge in sullen silence, and sat for hours, listlessly turning over the leaves of a book. Then again he would try to talk of indifferent matters, generally breaking down in the attempt, or he endeavoured to distract his mind by dwelling with restless solicitude on the details of their mourning, or the arrangements for the funeral. Sometimes he entered into discussion of their future plans; and to Ruth this was most painful of all. The way in which she recoiled from the subject proved that her apparent calmness only veiled an aching desolation of heart. She could not look forward, nor take any interest in the long, long life before her. David and Isabel clung to each other; and this brought home, as her mother had foretold, a keen sense of isolation. Already, when she constrained herself to give her mind to the plan proposed by David, she was obliged to differ from him, and therefore of necessity from Isabel.

David's plan was this. That, as the diminution of their income by their mother's death rendered the Red House and

garden too large for their means, his sisters should move to a small cottage just outside the park-gates of Dyne Court, which Sir John was anxious to let. This had been Clara's suggestion, whom he had seen in one of her numerous visits of inquiry, and she was wild about the scheme. Isabel was also in favour of it, since she had always disliked Holmdale, and she considered that their only tie to it would be broken by the necessity of forsaking their present home. Ruth said little, only pleading that there was no need to decide hastily, since they could not give up their house until Christmas. To which David replied that, if Mr. Dunn took the lease off their hands, as he was disposed to do, they might move at once.

The funeral took place on Saturday; and although Dr. Berkeley was the only person whom David had requested to attend, there were many others there, and not townspeople alone, for Sir John and his nephew rode over from Dyne Court at the appointed hour.

"The attention was very well taken," Sir John remarked, as they rode home after the ceremony. "Young Lennox seemed quite affected by it. I had no opportunity of speaking to those poor girls, and I was quite shocked to see them there. One of them, at any rate, would have been much better at home. I could not see through their crape veils whether it was Ruth or Isabel who cried so terribly."

"Isabel, of course," said Evelyn; "you would not suspect the other of any exhibition of feeling."

"Well," said Sir John, "I should think that Ruth must be most affected by her mother's death. Clara tells me that her devotion and tenderness were quite remarkable."

"Miss Lennox is much too conscientious to give way," said Evelyn, with a slight sneer; "but I must say that I admired her impassive manner to-day, for such violent emotion is not seemly in public."

And at that very time Isabel learned from David what her blinding tears had not suffered her to see, that Captain Gascoigne was among those gathered round the grave. She heard it in silence, but with a thrill of mingled feeling, and more than

once in that long comfortless day the thought recurred to her that *he* felt with and for her in this sorrow.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It is not that our later years
Of cares are woven wholly;
But smiles less swiftly chase the tears,
And wounds are healed more slowly,
And memory's vow
To lost ones now
Makes joys too bright unholy.

E. B. LYTON.

DR. BERKELEY had not spoken to Ruth, and had only seen her at the funeral since the day of her mother's death; but he ventured to join her as she walked back from church on Sunday morning, her brother and sister having started for a walk in the opposite direction. Ruth answered his inquiries after herself briefly and with indifference, and then made some remark on the weather, and it seemed that neither of them ventured to allude to the subject which filled the hearts of both; yet, when the Doctor would have taken leave at the door of the Red House, Ruth asked him to come in.

"If it will not be too much for you," he said.

"Oh no; or shall we go into the garden, which is pleasanter?"

Ruth led the way there, and silently acquiesced in the Doctor's suggestion that they should sit down on the sunny stone bench below the window. And as she sat, idly tracing figures on the gravel with the point of her parasol, and bending forward, so that even her profile was hidden by the folds of her crape veil, she made, in a grave, calm voice, the acknowledgment she had brought him there to hear.

"I wished to thank you, Dr. Berkeley, for all that you did for us on that day. If I had only sent a messenger to Wentworth Lodge, time must have been lost, and I don't know how Isabel would have borne it if they had been too late."

"You will believe me, Miss Lennox," replied the Doctor, in a tone by no means so composed as her own, "that, however

much I felt for her and David, I chiefly desired to spare you — of whom no one, and yourself least of all, appears to think."

"I shall do very well," said Ruth, as if she had had enough of the subject. But Dr. Berkeley felt that he must go on now he had begun.

"Do not suspect me of any intention to forfeit my pledge, or imagine that I am selfish and unfeeling enough to trouble you with hopes and fears which are out of keeping with your own sad thoughts. But, as a friend, you must permit me to take some interest in your future life, and David tells me that I am named as Isabel's guardian, which surely gives me some claim to your confidence."

"You need not find so many good reasons," said Ruth; "~~she~~ wished us to take counsel with you."

"Then you will not think me officious, if I ask whether it is true that you think of giving up this house, and taking the cottage by Dyne Court? Dunn told me, and he had it from Sir John."

"They have been talking of it," said Ruth; "but nothing is settled yet."

"And you do not wish it, I am sure."

"I do not know. I shall be sorry to leave this place; but otherwise I do not care what happens."

"You ought to care," said Dr. Berkeley, and, lover though he was, there was something paternal in the tone of the advice, and as such it was received by Ruth.

"I know I ought — so I will make a fresh start on Monday morning."

"Why not begin at once, and try to find out what you wish? I know that now life must seem to be without an object, but you will cast about for fresh interests, and these are more likely to spring up in Holmdale."

"So I have thought, in walking through the by-streets, where so much might be done. But Isabel, poor child, has a restless desire to leave the town."

"And you think this a sufficient reason for giving up your old home?"

Still Waters.

"We must move somewhere, for we cannot afford to keep this house and garden."

"If you wished it, Miss Lennox, nothing would be more easy."

Ruth did not comprehend his meaning, and she said, with a smile, "You have still to learn a guardian's duties, if you begin your career by advising an act of imprudence."

"I only wish to use a guardian's privilege in solving the difficulty. You know how far my expenses are from coming up to my income, and what pleasure it would give me to apply any portion of it to your convenience."

Ruth coloured, but replied promptly, and with decision, "Such an alternative, Dr. Berkeley, would appear to my brother and sister, as to myself, neither easy nor difficult, but simply impossible."

Mortified and disappointed, the Doctor made no attempt to urge his request; and when Ruth perceived how deeply he was wounded, she felt constrained to soften the pain of refusal.

"I did not mean to be ungracious," she said; "for indeed I am not ungrateful. But it will be really better to break up our establishment at once, for we shall only feel unsettled until it is done, and the change will be an interest and occupation for Isabel, though I don't mind confessing to you my disinclination for this cottage of Sir John's. Perhaps you may find an opportunity of talking it over with David."

The Doctor thanked her for the permission so warmly, that Ruth almost wished to retract it. She felt languid and ill, and quite unequal to the task of weighing her words with the care which their intercourse demanded, and Dr. Berkeley took leave as soon as he perceived the expression of weariness which crept over her face.

Ruth went up-stairs, and had just laid herself on her bed, when a quick, light step was followed by a knock she knew too well, and although she would have given much to avert the intrusion, there was no resource, and Clara entered before the permission was fairly spoken.

"My dear child!" she said, in a tone but one degree graver

it to be an usual, "I am so glad I made my way in. That Cerberus of yours tried to turn me with ignominy from the door, but I was certain you would see me, especially since I had discretion enough to start without telling Evelyn anything about it. So he went out with papa, and now I have sent the carriage away, and I mean to stay and go to church with you."

"I don't think I shall be able to go back to church," said Ruth.

"Now, don't be ungracious," said Clara, imploringly. "I mean to be very good and quiet, and not tire you in the least. So lay your head down on the pillow again, and let me talk. I declare," she continued, as Ruth complied with the request, "you don't look one bit better."

"What did you expect?" said Ruth, smiling faintly.

"You ought at least to feel less tired, now that your nights are unbroken."

"Unbroken!" Ruth repeated, with an expression of pain. "You little know."

"How should I know, Ruth, when you never tell me anything?"

"I only mean that the nights are the worst of all. If I sleep for five minutes together, I wake with a start, thinking I hear her bell or her low voice calling me. And I shall never hear it more!"

She turned her face away and burst into tears, and Clara, strangely moved, as once before, by the unwonted betrayal of feeling, clung round her with caressing tenderness.

"Do not cry, dear Ruth, for I would do anything to comfort you. It is no wonder you feel so wretched if you don't sleep, and it is enough to give you a fever or something of that sort. Change of air would be best, and I think that you had better come to Dyne Court at once."

No suggestion could have had a more sedative effect, for Ruth checked her tears to combat it. But no efforts could dispel an idea which had once taken possession of Clara's mind.

"I am sure it would be a good plan. We are quite alone

now, and you shall have your own rooms up-stairs, and be as quiet as you please. I shall ask Mr. Lennox as soon as ever he comes home."

"Pray do not, Clara."

"There is no harm asking," said Clara, with one of her wayward smiles.

"There is no use, however," said Ruth, sitting up, and speaking resolutely; "for I shall not go, whatever David says."

"I shall make him send for Mr. Ball, and you must do as he tells you. Then we can settle this charming plan about the cottage; you will see what alterations it needs, and Papa shall do whatever you fancy. It is all for your good," Clara added, as Ruth looked vexed, and forbore to argue the point; "and I should like so much to take care of you."

"For a day and a half; and then you would tire of me, as you did of that tame limet; do you remember?"

"Which Mr. Clinton caught and tamed, and you found it almost starved? Yes, I *do* remember the lecture visited upon me on that occasion, but I shall not starve *you*, or, at any rate, Isabel will be at hand to repair my negligence."

"Will you come to luncheon, Ruth?" said Isabel, half opening the door of the room. She had not been informed of Clara's presence there, and as soon as she perceived her she stopped short, and the colour rushed into her face; but she drove back the tears by a strong effort, and shook hands quietly.

Clara was more struck by the traces grief had left on the face she had last seen radiant in bright beauty, than by the less marked alteration which she saw in Ruth; and she said, remorsefully —

"I don't wonder that you hate the sight of me, Isabel, but you know that I never guessed how it was to be when I asked you to stay another day."

"I know," said Isabel, shrinking back; "please don't talk of it." And she sat listlessly down beside Ruth, who remarked that she seemed tired with her walk.

"We did not walk far," Isabel replied, idly intertwining her sister's fingers with her own, while it was evident that her thoughts were far away. It was a new thing for Clara to witness such absorbing grief, and she recoiled from emotion so uncongenial to her own temper. And Ruth perceived and indulged the feeling, asking whether she would not take compassion on David, who must wonder what they were all about.

"I will go," said Clara, springing up; and she thought the brightening smile with which David acknowledged the "unexpected happiness" contrasted pleasantly with the two sad and tear-stained faces from which she had just parted. He quite entered into her scheme of removing his sisters to Dyne Court, although not sanguine of his success in overcoming Ruth's disinclination to agree to it.

But in truth reason was for once on Clara's side. As the day wore on, Ruth's strength flagged more and more, and it was necessary to put Clara's playful threat into execution, and call in Mr. Ball. And her triumph was complete when Isabel wrote that he prescribed change of air and scene, and advised her removal to Dyne Court, until she had regained strength to undertake a longer journey. "I don't know whether you intended me to go with her," Isabel rather bluntly concluded her note, "but I really don't think Ruth is fit to go alone. She grows weaker and more languid every day."

"Of course I expect you all three," Clara wrote in answer; "and I have made papa put off one or two people who were coming, that the house may be quiet. Evelyn is still here, but he, you know, is one of the family."

The good people of Holmdale were rather scandalized by this visit to Dyne Court. It was surprising that Ruth should be equal to the overflowing spirits and liveliness of Miss Gascoigne, when she refused to receive the visits of her old friends, and Miss Perrott feared that she had weakly yielded to the eagerness of her brother and sister to pursue their respective flirtations, indecorous as it was, after their recent loss. But Isabel, at all events, was wronged by the imputation of any ulterior designs, for she looked forward to her meeting with Captain Gas-

coigne with unmixed pain, feeling that it would have been a relief to know that he was gone. The light, sparkling talk, which had seemed so pleasant at the time, would now be out of tune, and she had some misgivings whether there were any graver thoughts in reserve. Nor did Evelyn appear to be much delighted with this opportunity of renewing their intercourse; at least when Clara showed him the note in which Isabel begged that the carriage might be sent for them on the following day, he only raised his eyebrows, and asked whether he must measure his condolence by the depth of that black border.

On the morrow, however, the carriage came up the approach as Evelyn came in from shooting, and he gave his gun to the keeper, and hastened on, so as to be the first to reach the colonnade. Isabel's fancied indifference vanished when she found her hand fast locked in his; yet she drew back, and said that she must take care of Ruth.

"In that charge you have been anticipated," said Evelyn, as David gave his arm to his sister, and Clara followed. "Come and take a turn in the garden; it is a beautiful afternoon."

"I had better — I would rather see that Ruth is settled comfortably," said Isabel.

"I came home from shooting an hour earlier than usual with a view to our walk," said Evelyn, and Isabel answered with hesitation —

"I will come down again if I can, but indeed I must go to Ruth now. She is so weak, and Clara will only weary her with kindness."

"Your sister looks much as usual."

Isabel no longer hesitated, but answered with indignant quickness —

"So people say, forgetting that she was ever otherwise, because all looks of health have been worn away so long. She never spared herself, and now our doctor says that nature must have her revenge, and that the fatigue which was kept under for the time, is telling now. Oh! I have been so worried by the townspeople making their way in, wanting to see Ruth, and exhorting me not to let her give way or indulge a morbid love

of seclusion, I could not breathe freely till we left the last house behind us."

"And now you think me as bad as the townspeople?"

"Not quite," Isabel answered, rather demurely; and Evelyn acknowledged the compliment with a smile.

"Then," he resumed, when she was again about to leave him, "you will come back in a few minutes, or I shall certainly think that you put me in the same class as the United Service."

"I don't know; I suppose I shall come down in the evening."

"In the evening? I quite understood that you would be at dinner."

"Not if Ruth would like to have me with her."

"You think of nothing but Ruth," said Captain Gascoigne, with a playful inflection of his voice; but Isabel was startled, and not quite pleased by the familiar appellation. She had stooped to caress the glossy brown pointer which crouched and curled at her feet, and she raised her head with an air of unconscious dignity as she replied —

"My sister needs all our care."

"Well," said Captain Gascoigne, lightly, "I hope that duty need not interfere with the pleasure of seeing you at dinner." And whistling to his dogs, he sauntered on, while Isabel still stood leaning against a column, her clasped hands flung down, her eyes also downcast, perhaps to restrain the tears with which their full lids were charged. The sense of loneliness and depression which she had vainly hoped to leave behind her at Holmdale was as keenly felt as ever.

She was remorseful for having lingered so long, when she roused herself from a dream to go up-stairs. The door of Clara's boudoir was open when she passed along the corridor, and Clara herself was there, displaying to David the trinkets and ornaments with which the tables were loaded. He was duly sensible of the distinction of being admitted to her own peculiar sitting-room, and he examined every gold pen and étui with a care which tended to prolong the pleasure, while he informed

Isabel that they had left Ruth to rest, and that she had better see if she was in need of anything.

Ruth was not resting, for, like many excellent nurses, she was a very unmanageable patient; and because she felt peculiarly ill, and tired by her drive, she set to work to unpack and arrange the contents of the portmanteau, in which employment she was surprised by Isabel.

"I thought you might come in late," she said, anticipating her sister's reproaches, "and then you would not be ready for dinner."

Isabel did not vouchsafe to reply until she had constrained Ruth, with a force which she was too weary to resist, to lie down on the sofa, and then she asked —

"Must I go to dinner?"

"I think so, dear," said Ruth, a little surprised by her unwillingness; "Clara seems to expect it, and Sir John will be vexed if we are neither of us there. My head aches so much that I cannot sit through it to-night."

"Of course not," said Isabel, as she lightly laid her hand on her sister's feverish brows; "Mr. Ball says you are not to think of appearing except for a drive. And you will not let me stay and take care of you?"

"I will engage to lie quiet till you come up again," said Ruth; "but I think that we must live with the family, as we have come here. Of course it would be different if there were strangers in the house."

"Captain Gascoigne is here," said Isabel; and as her sister looked perplexed and anxious, she went on hurriedly: "Last time we spoke of him I was very ungracious and unreasonable; but now, Ruth, I should like to tell you how it really is. He is not changed, and he was the same all through that visit to the Lodge. It makes me sick now to think how happy I was that last afternoon when he made me walk with him to the garden after the others had gone in, and he gathered the scarlet geranium which you know I still wore. And even now I cannot hear his voice without a sort of happiness which is worse than —, because I know that it is heartless and unfeeling; and yet

I cannot answer him lightly, nor laugh and talk, as he seems to expect, and I don't like to vex him, so I would rather keep away."

"It must be painful," said Ruth; "but there would be something marked in avoiding all intercourse while you are living in the same home. And, besides, the instinct of love must teach him to understand and enter into your mood."

Ruth would not dispirit her sister still farther by expressing a fear lest that instinct should be wanting, but Isabel could draw the inference for herself. She sighed, and set about the task of preparing for dinner with the languor which arises from weariness of spirit.

CHAPTER XXVII

I class'd, appraising once,
Earth's lamentable sounds — the well-a-day,
The jarring yea and nay,
The fall of kisses on unanswering clay,
The sobb'd farewell, the welcome mournfuller;
But all did leaven the air
With a less bitter leaven of sure despair
Than these words — "I loved once."

E. B. BROWNING.

ONE morning, shortly after the arrival of their visitors, Sir John called Clara back, when she was leaving the breakfast-room, and asked if she had leisure to speak to him for a few moments. A certain solemnity in his tone prepared Clara for a paternal lecture, nor was she at a loss for its subject; but she carelessly assented, and followed her father into his study. She reclined in a rocking-chair, impatiently tapping her little foot on the ground as she moved to and fro, while Sir John stood with his back planted against the mantelpiece and his coat-tails under his arms; and then he cleared his throat, and began —

"How is Miss Lennox this morning?"

"Rather better; I hope she may be able to drive to the cottage after luncheon, for nothing can be settled until she has seen it."

"I dare say there would be many advantages in having them settled so near us. Ruth Lennox is a very safe friend."

"Very," said Clara, a little scornfully; "as steady as old Time, who, by the way, is the fastest gentleman of my acquaintance."

"As you say," returned Sir John, "Time is getting on, and you are of an age to be less heedless than before. Young Lennox is a good sort of young man — gentlemanlike, and remarkably well-looking; but you should not allow the pleasure of his society to run away with your discretion. I am afraid that even less encouragement would incline him to cherish hopes which can never be fulfilled, and your names begin to be spoken of together in the county."

"Only now, papa? I should have thought that the wedding-day had been fixed long ago."

"And Evelyn," continued Sir John, "seems to fancy that this is a more serious affair than usual."

This reference to her cousin seemed to awaken more interest in the discussion than Clara had yet evinced; but though she raised her eyes, which were before half closed, she only said, carelessly —

"Does Evelyn think so? He ought to know, for he has great experience in flirtations."

"My dear Clara!" said Sir John, not unnaturally roused from his habitual equanimity, "will you give me a straightforward answer, and tell me your motive in distinguishing David Lennox with such peculiar favour?"

"He amuses me," said Clara.

Sir John looked relieved, though he thought it necessary to take a high moral ground.

"Then it is a mere idle flirtation? I thought as much, and, as I said just now, it is quite time you should learn to have some consideration for other people. That was the way you went on with Lynmere, and he does not seem to get over it at all. I declare it makes me quite miserable to see him."

"Then suppose we drop the acquaintance. I am rather tired of the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance."

"Without feeling any remorse for his disappointment! And now it will be just the same thing with Lennox."

"How do you know that, papa? Perhaps, for the sake of proving that Evelyn is infallible, I may think it my duty to fall in love with him."

"I see, Clara, that there is no use talking to you."

"Indeed, papa?" said Clara, yawning. "I thought it must be useful, because it was so very disagreeable. But if you have really nothing more to say, I will go up and see whether Ruth is disposed for a drive."

The only apparent result of this conversation consisted in a still better understanding between Clara and David Lennox. Rain set in at twelve o'clock, defeating all projects for the afternoon, and Clara challenged David to a game at billiards, which lasted an unreasonable time. In his newly-awakened fit of prudence, Sir John fidgeted in and out, trying what he could do to prevent the two young people from being left so much together. He went in search of Isabel, but she was up-stairs with Ruth; and then he applied to his nephew, to go and mark for them, but Evelyn continued to read the *Times*, saying that he did not imagine that his services were required.

Later in the afternoon, Isabel came down to the drawing-room, considering that the wet weather would secure them against visitors, and she was interested in a discussion between Captain Gascoigne and her brother, respecting the improvements of which the cottage was capable, although less in favour of settling there than when the plan was first proposed. Evelyn had just taken up a pencil to illustrate his ideas, when Lord Raeburn was announced, whom Isabel was by no means disposed to encounter, and she made her escape by the door opening into the library. She fastened on a book, and sat there a good while, only rousing herself to throw up the window, when a gleam of watery sunshine struggled through the clouds, and she did not discover that Captain Gascoigne and Lord Raeburn had come into the colonnade with their cigars. After taking one or two turns, they sat down on a stone bench,

just below the window, and her attention was first arrested by the sound of her own name.

"I thought," said Lord Raeburn, taking the cigar from his mouth, "that the fair Isabel would show."

"Fair?" Evelyn repeated; "that is not a well-chosen epithet. You don't miss much — she is *triste* even with me, and the effect of much crape and many tears is not happy."

"I don't think the worse of her for that," rejoined Lord Raeburn. "I like these impulsive beings, since then, at least, one may be certain that they keep a heart — an organ in which some young ladies of my acquaintance are altogether deficient."

"Meaning my cousin Clara. You have not touched the right chord, that is all," said Evelyn carelessly.

"I have lost all wish to try. But I can tell you, Gascoigne, that if you were a less formidable rival, I should enter the lists against you."

"You are welcome," replied Evelyn. "I intend to retire from the field as soon as I can do so gracefully. And really you could not do better, since you are lucky enough to be independent of ways and means. I should be glad to see the Gitaña so well provided for, since it would be a pity to leave such queenly beauty to be wasted on some gentleman farmer or country apothecary."

There was something in this speech to offend even Lord Raeburn's feelings, which were far from being peculiarly sensitive. He threw away the end of his cigar with a gesture of impatience, observing that he should go and join Lennox, whom he saw upon the terrace.

Captain Gascoigne was not long left to the enjoyment of his own meditations, for his name was spoken in a voice he did not at first recognise, and he turned his head to find Isabel by his side. All his habitual coolness did not enable him to parry the indignant scorn flashing from those dark eyes; he stood up, and waited for her to speak.

"I wished to tell you," said Isabel, "that I was in the library, and heard all that passed between Lord Raeburn and yourself

— involuntarily at first; but when I discovered that I was myself the subject of discussion, I had the meanness to wait and hear the end. And now I have to thank you for your good offices."

Evelyn was perfectly confounded, and replied with hesitation: "You misunderstood me — you take up the matter too seriously. Was it likely that I should express my real sentiments to such a conceited puppy as Raeburn?"

"People do not usually feign sentiments which do them so little credit," said Isabel.

"And, after all," continued Evelyn, recovering some assurance, "you must not judge me too severely. My unhappy position as captain in a marching regiment, without independent means, will not permit me to consult my own inclinations; and I wanted resolution to tell you sooner that I am compelled to fall in with Sir John's wishes, who destines me to be his son-in-law."

"Indeed?" said Isabel.

"You look incredulous, Miss Lennox; and, indeed, there has been nothing in my relations with my cousin to give colour to such an intention. But you do not know Clara so well as I do."

"It is enough," said Isabel, clasping her hands upon her beating heart, for her powers of endurance were well-nigh spent; "I have no wish to penetrate Clara's sentiments, and I must again apologise for having unwittingly led you to disclose your own."

"Do not say so," said Captain Gascoigne, still detaining her when she attempted to pass; "you know that I ought rather to ask your forgiveness. And if we can no longer be to each other what we were, say at least that we part friends."

"As friends!" Isabel repeated, in a tone of bitter irony; and Evelyn bowed — and not in mockery, but with genuine admiration for her haughty and commanding beauty — as he stood aside and suffered her to pass.

Isabel re-entered the library, but she did not tarry there; she hurried up the broad, shallow-stepped stair to her own

room, and secured the door against intrusion. And then the expression of every muscle of her face was changed — the light of her eyes quenched in blinding tears, and the pride of haughty defiance lost in an agony of shame and humiliation. The tones of Evelyn's voice, easy and unconcerned as ever, still rang in her ears, as he had transferred his claim to her love with careless condescension to another. And the insult seemed more marked by the assurance that Clara Gascoigne was to be the next object of pursuit, and the quiet assumption that he could not sue in vain. "And I loved him," thought Isabel, — "oh, how blindly! — I could more readily have believed myself untrue than him."

There was a knock at the door, and David asked to be admitted, so Isabel hastily washed away her tears and complied with the request. But the traces of such violent emotion were not so easily effaced, and David remarked them with gentle upbraiding! "My dear child! no wonder you grow dispirited, moping here all the afternoon. Come down to the terrace with me, for there is still time for a turn before dinner."

"It is late," said Isabel.

"Yes; so I shall not have time to tire you."

"And Lord Raeburn is here."

"No; I knew you would not care to see him, so I waited till he was gone — much to his discomfiture, let me tell you. Do come out — it is really a fine afternoon."

Isabel could not withstand her brother's importunity, and he waited while she sought out cloak and goloshes, gaily declaring that he did not dare lose sight of her, lest her resolution should fail. They went down together to the west terrace, and David was in high spirits; he admired the sunset, and predicted a return of good weather; and he pointed out the picturesque effect of a group of cedars, their broad and massive foliage looking black against the glowing sky. But Isabel's replies were brief, and often inconsequent, and at last he said, a little impatiently —

"Now, Isabel, it is your turn to contribute something to the entertainment of the walk; you are more sad than ever."

Isabel started, and said that it had been a long, rainy day.

"I have not found it long," said David; "and we had our own peculiar sunshine at home, so that I was perfectly indifferent to the weather out of doors."

The allusion failed to rouse Isabel, and, after walking a few paces further, David thought fit to speak plainly —

"My leave expires next month, and I cannot go without knowing my fate."

— "You mean to speak to Clara?"

"And to Sir John — that is the worst part of the business."

"Yes," said Isabel; but her assent was too indifferent to satisfy her brother, and he said, quickly —

"I don't believe that you are attending, Isabel, or that you care in the least what may happen to me."

"Oh, David!" exclaimed Isabel, the tears starting to her eyes in her eagerness to disclaim the accusation. "I *do* care, indeed; and I am sure that Clara will never find another to love her so well."

"That is true," said David, with kindling eyes, "and I think Clara feels it. You must see, Isabel, how she appeals to me in everything. We continued to discuss the plans for the cottage after Raeburn came in, and if I differed either from him or Gascoigne, she always took part with me. I cannot endure suspense much longer; but when once assured of her love, the opposition we are likely to meet with from Sir John will not daunt me. I can wait patiently for years."

Isabel saw that his sanguine temper would not permit him to contemplate the reverse of the picture, and any attempt to moderate his expectations was set aside with indignant quickness. So she fulfilled the part of a sympathizing listener as well as she could, glad to be released when David at last discovered that her step was slow and languid, and that it was not advisable to linger in the chill evening air. Isabel crept up to her room again, and knew not how long she had sat alone and in the dark, until Ruth came in with a candle, and then she started up, and said remorsefully —

"Oh, Ruth! I have never come near you this whole afternoon."

"I saw that you and David were having a good walk on the terrace," said Ruth, "and I was very comfortable and quiet until towards dressing-time, when Clara came in for a gossip. But do you know that it is just dinner-time?"

"I did not know it was so late," said Isabel, as she unfasted her cloak, and began her preparations for dressing in a dreamy way which attracted Ruth's attention.

"I think," she said, "you were asleep when I came in."

"No, not asleep."

"Only tired," said Ruth, tenderly. "David should not have kept you out so long. I am to be the brisk one to-night, for Clara declares that I am well enough to go down to dinner, and I believe I am."

Isabel said that she was glad, and she felt that her sister's presence would be some protection. They went down together, and Ruth's first appearance in the drawing-room made quite a sensation; it was natural that Evelyn should address himself to her, while Isabel sat still and silent, and tightly clasping her sister's hand, which hung passively by her side. Sir John was also profuse in his inquiries, but it did not occur to Isabel until dinner was announced and he gave his arm to the elder sister, that she must go in with Captain Gascoigne. There was a moment's hesitation, and not on Isabel's side alone, but when Clara said lightly, "Well, Isabel, we wait your pleasure," she could delay no longer, and she passed her hand within Captain Gascoigne's arm.

As they crossed the hall he hoped that she had not suffered from her late walk, and she answered, "Not at all, thank you!" in a tone quiet and steady as his own.

At dinner Evelyn talked across the table to Ruth, to whom he found more to say than in all their previous acquaintance; and though it cost Ruth an effort to talk at all, since the lights and voices made her dizzy, she responded as well as she could, thinking that it would please Isabel.

And Isabel was unmolested, except that Clara said suddenly —

"Ever since we sat down to dinner, Isabel, I have been wondering what made you look so unlike yourself, and now I see that it is the way you have done your hair."

"Yes, said Isabel, thankful to accept the reason she had suggested; "my curls fell out in our wet walk, and I went to dress so late that I could only put them away."

She hardly spoke again for the rest of the evening, but Ruth had not seen her before in society, and she did not discover that her spirits were more than usually depressed. The sisters were not alone together, for Ruth went up to her room early in the evening, and Isabel chose to think it better not to disturb her again. In truth she recoiled from the confession which must be made, sooner or later.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Mein dunkles Herz liebt dich,
Es liebt dich, und es bricht,
Und bricht und zuckt und verblutet,
Aber du siehst es nicht.

H. HEINE.

RUTH paid for her evening's dissipation with a sleepless night, and a headache so severe that she was unable to lift her head from the pillow. When Isabel went in with her morning greeting, she could only darken the rooms, and leave her sister in peace, deferring for the present the communication which she had to make.

Though Isabel's curls clustered round her face as usual, she did not look much more like herself, and Clara observed her depression, and applied herself to dissipate it with gay good humour. "You must have a ride," she said; "we will order the horses at twelve, for it may rain this afternoon, and one or both of the gentlemen will be delighted to be your squire."

"If you can command Lennox's services, perhaps mine
Still Waters.

may be dispensed with," said Evelyn; "I have designs on the pheasants."

"Mr. Lennox is more accommodating," said Clara; and the hint was enough for David, although he was disappointed to find that she was not to be of the party. Clara declared that she must attend to her household duties, and would reserve herself for a walk to the cottage in the afternoon; and Sir John, apparently occupied in eating toast and reading the *Times*, was gratified by the playful determination with which she resisted David's importunity to postpone these domestic cares, regarding it as a concession to a filial duty.

The rest of the party dispersed, and Evelyn Gascoigne was left in undisturbed possession of the breakfast-room and of his own thoughts. These were of no pleasing character, for he had not recovered his annoyance at the *contretemps* of the previous day. The reserved and quiet dignity of Isabel's manner repelled such attempts at conciliation as he was disposed to make, and in his impatience to extricate himself from a false position, his thoughts turned towards Clara.

"I shall have no difficulty *there*," he thought; "and though I had not intended to make the final plunge so soon, I believe that wholesome neglect has been carried far enough. A little more pique will entangle her in an engagement with Lennox, and any opposition from Sir John would only rouse her wilful spirit to persist in it."

And he acted promptly on the conclusion to which he had arrived, for he laid aside the paper, and went up-stairs to seek his cousin.

After she had driven Ruth almost distracted by her restless movements round the room, altering her pillows, and begging her to try aromatic vinegar, eau de Cologne, and every other conceivable remedy which might alleviate the pain, Clara at last retreated to her boudoir, to devote the morning to the formidable pile of tradesmen's books which had accumulated on her writing-table. But she turned from the distasteful occupation with great alacrity when her cousin entered the room.

"So it is only you, Evelyn. I was afraid it might be Smith,

come to talk about the 'butcher, the baker, and candlestick-maker,' and hope it was all right. Of course it is all right, or, if it is all wrong, it does not much signify. But I thought you had gone shooting."

"I may go out later in the day, to save appearances," said Evelyn; "but the truth was, I had no desire to ride with Isabel Lennox."

"I thought," said Clara, "that I was consulting your inclinations in proposing it."

"Very benevolent of you; but, as it happens, my inclinations lead me to pass the morning with you. And so I have come."

Clara's eyes sparkled with the light of triumph, tempered, however, by some gentler feeling, as she said —

"I must say, Evelyn, that you have treated Isabel excessively ill."

"Not so ill as you have treated her brother."

"I do not know what you mean," said Clara, with rising colour.

"Then I will make my meaning clear. You care as little for David Lennox as I do for Isabel; and it is time this child's play should cease. We were children in years when first I said that you should be my wife, yet we were in earnest. I am in earnest now, and I claim your promise."

Evelyn had not misconstrued the nature of his cousin's sentiments, veiled as they were by her indifferent and flighty manner. The conviction of his indifference had only riveted her affections more securely, and now she could scarcely believe her own exceeding happiness. When Evelyn drew her to his side, she did not withdraw from his embrace, but hid her face on his shoulder, and burst into tears.

Isabel came down habited at twelve o'clock, and found her brother waiting for her very disconsolately. He complained that Clara had not been in the drawing-room since breakfast, and that he had seen no one but Sir John, who had looked in an hour ago, and informed him that he would ride with them as far as the farm. A message that the horses were at the door

brought Sir John from the study, his open countenance beaming with satisfaction; but the cause did not transpire until they had ridden some way along the avenue. And then he said abruptly —

"I have been quite taken up all the morning, for the thing is only just settled; and I believe Clara will be best pleased that you should hear it from me."

Isabel instantly divined the truth; but David said, with perfect unconsciousness —

"I fancied that there must be some family crisis, from the unusual calm which reigned in the drawing-room."

Sir John felt relieved, imagining that David was prepared for the communication he had to make.

"Then, perhaps, you were in Evelyn's confidence. No one could be more surprised than I was to hear of his attachment, and no less, that it was returned by Clara."

An exclamation broke from David, brief and stormy; but as he rode on Isabel's other side, she trusted that it was unheard by Sir John, as well as the hoarse whisper in which he added, laying his hand on her horse's neck —

"In the name of Heaven, Isabel, what does he mean?"

Isabel's first thought was for her brother. For herself she felt that the words which had fallen from Evelyn's own lips exhausted the capacity of after suffering. Without daring to look towards David, she asked, with a face of rigid calmness —

"I don't quite understand, Sir John. Is Clara engaged to Captain Gascoigne?"

"Even so. No one can accuse Clara of trifling this time; for as soon as Evelyn had spoken, they came down to me. We talked it all over, and I had no peace till it was settled. Certainly, Clara might have done better; but her heart was set on it, and there was no more to be said. It seems that she and Evelyn have loved each other from childhood."

Again Sir John paused, and what was Isabel to say? David did not help her, and she forced her parched lips to utter the words from which her soul revolted as false and hollow.

"Then it is no secret, and I may wish Clara joy."

"Yes; there is no use making a mystery, even though the marriage may not take place at once. Evelyn thinks of going back to his duty for a few months; but of course he must sell out before they marry, for it would never do for my little Clara to follow the camp. So there will be a step for you, Lennox." The last words were spoken with benign complacency, as if such substantial consolation must outweigh the disappointment of any visionary hopes. David did not undeceive him, and he presently resumed:

"Many of our friends will think that Clara might have made a more brilliant marriage, and so indeed she might, if she had so chosen. But I must confess that my feudal affection for this old place inclines me to overlook other objections for the sake of seeing it and the name go together. And I know no one so universally popular as Evelyn."

While Sir John spoke, David employed himself in checking and spurring his horse, until the thorough-bred animal was chafed into an almost ungovernable temper, and fearless as Isabel was in general, she could not restrain an exclamation of dismay —

"Oh, David, please take care!"

"What matter?" he answered, fiercely; and Sir John misconstrued his impatience, or thought it best to do so.

"You and Prince are equally eager for a gallop," he said, "and you need not scruple to be off, for I turn up to the farm here. In my younger days I have had many a scamper up that green slope."

"Come, then, Isabel," said David; and he started at such a reckless pace, that Isabel was soon breathless and exhausted, and she checked her horse, declaring that she could go no farther. David turned upon her a face as colourless as when he began this wild career, and said, "You did your congratulations well."

"I was forced to say something," said Isabel, "and I was partly prepared."

"And you did not tell me."

"I knew nothing of Clara, and it was only yesterday that Captain Gascoigne informed me of his intentions."

"They loved each other from childhood!" said David, the words escaping from between his set teeth; "truly, such constancy is admirable! She loved him — the very word is profaned when it is taken within her lips. And for Gascoigne — such genuine feeling as he may have once possessed, was long since frittered away in a succession of idle flirtations."

Isabel shivered, so that the slight riding-whip almost escaped from her grasp; but she recovered it, and her emotion was unheeded by her brother — he could think only of his own wrongs.

"It was first and only love," he continued. "I trusted so entirely, believing her to be bright and pure, faultless, and my own. One little hour ago I was happy in the assurance of her affection, and now all is blighted. I shall never trust woman more!"

"I know what it must be," said Isabel.

"You know what it is. Now I know the cause of your depression, and I do not wonder, for I too was deceived, and fancied that Gascoigne's heart was touched at last, and that he was in earnest in his pursuit. Yet, Isabel, we do not suffer equally, for Gascoigne is not, cannot be to you what *she* has been to me — justifying any infatuation by her bright grace and winning ways."

Isabel was silent; she felt both each had invested their idol with hues of their own fancy; the illusion was past, and the awakening sufficiently bitter. David only spoke again to assert the impossibility of remaining under the same roof, or even in the same neighbourhood with Clara. He said that he should join the dépôt immediately, and Isabel did not attempt to dissuade him from this intention.

The servant informed them, as they dismounted, that Miss Gascoigne was at luncheon, and David threw the reins to the man, and ran up-stairs to his own room without bestowing a look or word on Isabel. So she repaired alone to the dining-room, feeling that, though a man may forego his luncheon when

he is crossed in love, it would be considered too strong a measure for a woman to take. Evelyn was there, sitting beside his cousin, and not, as usual, at the opposite end of the table. His manner was easy and pleasant as ever, and not unduly excited by his brilliant prospects; but Clara looked restlessly, feverishly happy, her eyes glowing like stars, her cheeks tinged with colour of almost too deep a shade for beauty. She looked up with nervous quickness; but she was reassured by Isabel's composure, and even doubtful whether Sir John had fulfilled his promise of imparting the fact of her engagement.

"I hardly expected you so soon," she said, after waiting a moment for Isabel to speak first.

"We rode fast, and kept within the park gates," replied Isabel.

"Has Lennox come home?" Evelyn asked; and Isabel said "Yes," adding that he did not want any luncheon.

"He is a wise man," said Evelyn, pushing back his chair; "a cigar would be more to the purpose. So you will find me in the colonnade, Clara, when you are inclined for a walk." He left the room, and the tightening sense of suffocation at Isabel's heart was relieved by his absence; she looked up, and could breathe freely.

"Perhaps you have not seen papa," said Clara, after an embarrassed silence.

"Yes; Sir John has told us; but I did not know whether the matter was so far declared that I ought to say anything about it. Besides, Clara," continued Isabel, her constrained tone insensibly melting into one of impassioned earnestness, "you must feel how difficult — how impossible it is for me to do so. I do not speak of myself; all that is past, as though it had never been. But if you think of David, you will not ask me to wish you joy."

"Does Mr. Lennox care so much?" said Clara, with an air of unconsciousness which was not wholly affected; for, in truth, such compunction as she had been at leisure to feel was bestowed on Isabel. Too indignant to reply, Isabel gathered up

the sweeping folds of her riding-skirt, and said that she should go to Ruth.

"Stop one moment," Clara said, imploringly; "promise that you will not make Ruth quite hate me. I care very little what other people say, but I don't want her to give me up."

"You may tell your own story," said Isabel.

"No, that will not do, either. I have hovered in and out, and asked after her head, without ever finding courage to begin; so you may go first, and I will follow, to clear up discrepancies."

Isabel turned away, and chid the faint heart which inclined her to linger in the corridor or retreat to her own room. All must be told to Ruth before the wave closed over it for ever, and she would tell her now, if she was fit to bear it; so she opened the door of her sister's room and went in. Ruth was dressed, and lying on the couch; and she said, in answer to her sister's inquiries, that her headache was nearly gone. Isabel sat down and took off her hat, so that her curls might fall down and shade her face in tangled luxuriance; but even her attitude expressed dejection, and Ruth said, gently —

"You are not happy here, Isabel?"

"Are you?" she replied; and Ruth said, with a grave smile —

"Happiness is comparative, and I should at least be happier if you would tell me what you wish. After all, I believe there is much to be said for this cottage of Sir John's."

"Oh no, no," said Isabel, vehemently; "let us go home."

"Back to Holmdale?"

"Anywhere but here. There is no use keeping back the truth, and you foresaw some such end long ago. Ruth, he never loved me; and whether true to Clara or no, he is equally false to me."

"To Clara?"

"He is engaged to Clara."

"Poor child!" said Ruth, laying her hand on Isabel's throbbing temples; but she withdrew from the light caressing touch as if it seared her brow.

"You need not pity me; I can bear it; and just now I think most of David. A month ago it might have been different: it would have broken my heart or driven me wild to learn what I now know. But since we have seen death, and felt its power and its peace, it seems strange and pitiful that these earthly cares should touch us so nearly as they do."

"It is not for long," said Ruth, softly; "and each fresh trial teaches us to look and long for the haven where we would be."

"Yet some people are happy."

"And you have great capacity for happiness, and are not yet so old that you need despair. Bright days may come, though not of our seeking."

"I don't care to seek them," said Isabel; "I would rather not look forward, if only I can escape from the past. But let us go home, for I cannot quite bear to see him and Clara together, and David is still more impatient. You cannot guess, Ruth, how bitterly disappointed he is, for you did not see what encouragement Clara gave him to the very last. And now she asks whether he cares!"

"Oh, Isabel!" said Clara, coming in as she spoke, "I told you not to misrepresent me."

"I repeated your very words," said Isabel, subsiding at once into the tone of disdainful calmness which pained Ruth more than her unrestrained expression of feeling. And it was, in truth, so difficult to sustain, that she was glad to comply with her sister's advice to go and take off her habit.

"Which shows great magnanimity," Clara observed, "since the field is thereby left open to me. But I will be patient if you like to take me to task."

"It is not worth while," said Ruth.

"Do not say that. It is ungrateful not to care what becomes of me, when I have just had my first quarrel with Evelyn because he spoke slightly of you."

At that moment Ruth felt that it was as high an honour as she could receive to be slighted by Evelyn Gascoigne; and Clara read her thoughts, and said with pique —

"After all, if you think so ill of Evelyn and myself, you ought to rejoice that you have escaped the double connection."

"And so lightly, Clara, you can speak of your own heartless coquetry?"

"I am sorry — as sorry as I can be about anything just now — that Mr. Lennox is so much disappointed, and I should not have gone on in that way if I had dared to hope that Evelyn really cared for me. As it was, I determined to prove to him and myself that I cared as little; and when you call me heartless, you cannot guess how my heart used to pant and throb when Evelyn passed me by with his cool, disdainful air, showing that he saw through my efforts to be unconcerned, and only despised and ridiculed them."

"And, thinking of him as you did, you encouraged the passion of another!"

"I liked Mr. Lennox very well; I wished to like him better; and, at all events, I wished to have done with Evelyn. And so, as I told him this morning, he spoke only just in time; for when I found that he had been setting papa against such an imprudent marriage, I was quite resolved to prove how little I regarded his opinion. You need not look so indignant, Ruth; for, after all, I only follow his lead, and you don't seem to resent Isabel's wrongs half so much."

"Because I loved you, Clara."

Clara's eyes glittered with smiles and tears: "And you will go on loving me, in spite of yourself, and of all I have done to vex you. You will not give me up now."

"Your own instinct," said Ruth, gravely, "must teach you the impossibility of meeting as before. Isabel shall not be exposed to the pain and humiliation of seeing Captain Gascoigne in his new relations."

"And so you mean to drop the acquaintance altogether?"

"We must be beholden to you for house-room to-night, and then we shall go home."

"But you cannot prevent my coming to see you."

"No," said Ruth, "I cannot prevent you from following your self-willed ends, at the cost of any suffering to others."

Clara was deeply wounded.

"This from you, Ruth," she said, "who profess to be better and more charitable than the rest of the world!"

"I never made such a profession, Clara; but you must suffer me to speak some of the irritation I feel, when I see the suffering brought upon David and Isabel — all I have left on earth to love."

"We will not talk any more about it," said Clara, pouting; "I shall go and walk with Evelyn, since you say such disagreeable things." However, she still lingered, and presently threw her arms round Ruth. "Dear Ruth! If I say that I am sorry, will not *you* say that you are glad? No one cares for me as you have done; and I did hope for one little word to show that you enter into my happiness."

Ruth was touched, and kissed the soft cheek, so lovingly pressed against her own, though she spoke gravely as before.

"You ask too much, Clara, knowing at whose cost your happiness is attained."

"I loved him so much," said Clara; "I don't believe that he cares for me in the same way, and yet I could not give him up to Isabel."

There was a shade of bitterness in her light tone; but since Ruth did not contradict her, she was eager to retract her words —

"Though, after all, Ruth, you do not know him in the least, and cannot guess how much feeling may lie beneath his *insouciant* manner. You are often cold and reserved enough yourself."

"It would take too long to prove the points I may have in common with Captain Gascoigne," said Ruth, smiling faintly; "for I really cannot talk any more. My headache is coming on, and I have still another confidence to receive."

"Mr. Lennox?" said Clara, looking conscious and amused, as if her penitence was not very deep. "You must tell him how sorry I am, if that will do him any good."

She flitted away, and was quite charmed to find Evelyn im-

patient of her long delay, and accusing her of losing the best part of the afternoon.

Very reluctantly David complied with the request sent through Isabel, that he would come and see Ruth; and there was a change of countenance at any allusion to the name of Gascoigne, which deterred her from approaching the subject. But, after sitting for awhile in moody silence, he said abruptly —

"I suppose Isabel told you that I mean to go off to York to-morrow."

"Yes; and that was why I particularly wished to see you."

"You need not try to persuade me to stay, or to sacrifice anything to appearances. *She* has shown herself reckless of what may be said or thought of her levity of conduct, and for me a little more contempt matters not. I only know that I am pining to escape from this place."

"And all I wish is, that you should take Isabel with you. Your leave does not expire until the first of November, and the intervening fortnight might be spent at the Lakes, as you once proposed. I am so anxious to spare her the pain of hearing the story canvassed in Holmdale, as it will be, when it first transpires."

David was averse to the plan, for he was in no humour for pleasure seeking, and found a rather perverse satisfaction in the prospect of returning to uncongenial companions and the discomforts of a barrack life. But his mood changed when Isabel entered, looking tired and spiritless, and evincing no interest in the discussion. She said that she would rather be quiet, and that it would not be worse at Holmdale than elsewhere.

"It will be a great deal worse," said David. "I will not be such a selfish wretch as to leave you a prey to the impertinent curiosity of all your dear friends. We will start on our travels together, and we shall at least be good company for each other."

Isabel smiled tearfully, and suffered her objections to leaving Ruth alone in the Red House to be overruled. David

resolved to return to Holmlade that night to collect his things, and he went to inform Sir John of his intentions, and was two miles on his road before Captain Gascoigne and Clara returned from their pleasant saunter among the green alleys of the garden. Evelyn was sufficiently aware of his practice of throwing his possessions headlong into a portmanteau, to smile a little at such elaborate forethought; but he made no remark, and possibly he was as much relieved as Clara to avoid a meeting.

Ruth tried to persuade herself and Isabel that she was able to go down to dinner; but before the time came her headache had returned with such force that she could not leave the sofa. So Isabel went down alone, and talked at least as much as her companions. This projected tour was a great resource; and Evelyn, who was well acquainted with the Lake country, wrote down the names of the inns and other useful facts. But when Clara went into Isabel's deserted room on the following morning, she found that the paper on which the information was written, had been torn up, and twisted into allumettes.

David had come to fetch her before the family was astir, and later in the day Ruth returned to her desolate home.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Signora Eleonora did not make one of that numerous sisterhood who use their own sorrows as a club, with which to knock down other people's spirits.

Doctor Antonio.

RUTH looked anxiously for her sister's return, and there was no effort in the cheerfulness with which she greeted her arrival. Isabel was tearful; but so she must have been if she had never known Evelyn Gascoigne, for she thought of the last coming home, as well as of former short absences, when her mother's pale face had lighted up with pleasure to meet her entrance. Now there was but one to welcome her, and the sense of bereavement came upon her with the force of a fresh grief. After tea, however, when they sat down for an un-

disturbed talk, she told her adventures pleasantly, if not with much spirit, and then she demanded Ruth's news.

"I believe I wrote everything as it happened," said Ruth; "I must say that my letters were longer than yours."

"I know mine were meagre," replied Isabel, "but my ideas could not flow upon paper; and I was generally too tired when we got to our inn to have many left. It is strange how things turn out; I used to look forward to such an expedition with David as only too delightful to come to pass, and now we went through it as a necessary task."

"Yet not without enjoyment," said Ruth; "and at any rate it will be pleasant to remember."

"Perhaps. At least, I shall like some of the best things we saw all the better for their sad associations. Our brightest morning was at Coniston, so still and clear that the reflections on the lake were unbroken, and the colouring of the trees was gorgeous. As we lay on the hill-side, David went over the story of his wrongs; how much he had loved her, and how his whole life was blighted. And while we were talking, the wind changed, and a mist came up and blotted all the view, so that I could not help thinking of those lines:

But rosy clouds that morning brings
Ere noon may deepen into thunder,
And life's dark stream has sterner things
Than silver lilies growing under."

Ruth made no reply, and after a few moments' silence Isabel spoke again."

"You did not tell me *everything*, Ruth. For I suppose you have seen Clara?"

"Yes, once or twice."

"And is she happy?"

"In a certain sense. I did not think it possible for her to be so much in earnest."

"You mean," said Isabel, "that she loves him too well for her own happiness."

Ruth looked grieved, and unwilling to reply. "I thought, dear," she said, "that we had agreed not to speak of the past."

"Only this once," said Isabel, clasping her hands tightly together. "I know that I am very weak, but all this while I have thirsted so much to know. Are they still here?"

"Captain Gascoigne goes off to Gibraltar this week."

"I am so thankful that David is at the depôt, and that they will not meet at present, for he is very bitter against him, much more than against Clara. The letter you forwarded to Keswick was from another of the officers, Captain Newry, who had heard of this engagement, but not of course that David had any interest in it. He asked whether we knew the lady, and said that at any rate it was a good speculation;" and Isabel's proud lip curved, "for something had transpired lately to show that Captain Gascoigne was very much embarrassed; and I do believe, Ruth, that *that* was his real motive, and that he really does not care for her."

"That does not make his conduct more excusable," said Ruth.

And Isabel answered shortly, "I do not wish to excuse him."

Ruth sighed, and attempted to lead the conversation into a fresh channel.

"You have never commented on our move to Bean-street, Isabel. Since you and David refused to have a voice in the matter, I was forced to let the Doctor decide, and he was in favour of our taking the old house, since it has stood empty so long that we could have it on our own terms. There is to be a break at the end of the first six months, so that we can flit again if we like; and when the rooms are repapered, and filled with our own things, they will not look so gaunt and dreary as they did in Mrs. Clinton's day. You perceive I have begun to pack up such of our possessions as we mean to take, for we ought to move next week."

"To be succeeded by the Dunns, which is rather grievous. Only think how those children will run riot over my flower-beds, and harry the birds' nests, which I have protected from old Joe ever since we took to gardening together."

"For your sake old Joe will protect them now," said Ruth.

"Mr. Dunn has promised to take him on. He has been very

good-natured in all arrangements of taking over the house, and offered to let us stay till Christmas, if it would be more convenient. But I thought that we might as well move at once."

"I suppose so," said Isabel, listlessly.

"I was afraid you would not like the Bean-street house, but it was necessary to decide on something. Have you anything better to suggest?"

"Not in Holmdale, for all houses are much alike except our own. But I cannot quite see why we should settle here when we have all the world before us. I cannot tell you how my heart sank when we came to the lamp at the turnpike, and then rattled over the stones. And we have no tie here."

"There is the churchyard," said Ruth, softly; but she repented her words when she perceived their effect on Isabel. She hid her face, and said, with a convulsive sob —

"Oh, Ruth! you may well think me selfish and unfeeling to have forgotten that."

"You had not forgotten it, dear; and it is because you feel so strongly, that this place seems so intolerable. I don't mean that the thought should influence us, if there were any reason for leaving Holmdale; but since our lot is cast here, it seems like impatience to seek to change it merely because things do not go smoothly just now. If at the end of the six months —"

"Please don't say any more about it," said Isabel; "I was only fretful and impatient. And I have still some dropped stitches to pick up, for you never told how the Dyne Court news was taken here."

"It made an impression, of course," said Ruth, not knowing whether to admire or deplore the hardihood with which Isabel chose to face the dreaded subject; "but the interest has subsided already. Miss Perrott, who may be considered an index of Holmdale opinions, could talk of nothing yesterday but the new master, Mr. Mayne. She says that the Doctor has settled him here, nominally as extra master, but really that he may do some of the parish work which the Vicar leaves undone. Mr. Mayne has begun energetically to map out the town into districts, and the ladies are in many minds about undertaking

them; so I shall put in my claim at once for a good slice of the Netherton, where the people look so qualid and neglected. And then, dear, we shall have new ties to Holmdale."

Isabel tried to take equal interest in the scheme, but her attention soon flagged; only when Ruth again quoted Miss Perrott she roused herself to say —

"Do you get all your information at second-hand, Ruth? I should have expected the Doctor to confide his plans to you."

"I have not seen much of the Doctor lately," said Ruth, vexed with herself for colouring, though it did not attract her sister's attention, "and we have always had some business to talk over."

In truth, their intercourse had been scanty and unsatisfactory, and only marked by increasing constraint, since Dr. Berkeley's dread of transgressing the prescribed conditions deprived him of all ease, although he unconsciously gathered hope, which he feared to dissipate by any premature declaration.

For a whole week after Isabel's return, the Gascoigne livery was not seen in Holmdale, — an event of such rare occurrence as to justify the gossips of the place in shaking their heads over the unfortunate faculty evinced by the Lennoxes for destroying their own prospects. "There is poor Ruth," Miss Perrott, said, confidentially; "she never held up her head after that misguided young Clinton absconded with five or six hundred pounds" — the sum increased every year at a usurious rate of interest — "he was unworthy of her in every way, and now Isabel has been equally foolish in aspiring to marry as much above her real station. It was quite extraordinary that Ruth should suffer her to go on as she did; and not for want of warning, either, for I happen to know that some people spoke to her seriously on the subject." And Miss Perrott puckered up her withered little face, complacent in the consciousness of her superior sense and foresight.

Ruth and Isabel were duly grateful for the respite they enjoyed, although Ruth had already guarded against any intrusion from Dyne Court, by directions that Sally should admit no one. In fact, their rooms were no longer in a condition to receive

visitors, and their time was fully occupied in transferring books and furniture to Bean-street, and disposing of them in order in their new abode.

Ruth aimed at making the parlour a miniature edition of the cheerful and spacious sitting-room at the Red House, and she was congratulated on her success. Even Isabel, who watched her proceedings with languid surprise, smiling at her anxiety to place the sofa and table in the same relative position to each other, admitted that when the fire was lit, and the curtains drawn, it would be almost possible to believe themselves at home. But from Ruth herself, no change in the outward aspect of the room could shut out the recollection of its former inmates. She still pictured to herself the tall, angular form and rigid features of Mrs. Clinton, as she sat at work, and Jasper's boyish figure, bending over his books, or, as she had last seen him, crushed with grief and shame, after receiving the intelligence of his mother's death. She did not shrink from such associations, in which there was a pain so akin to pleasure that she would have felt to blame in moving to the house, if she had not referred the decision entirely to Dr. Berkeley.

Ruth had discontinued all invalid habits on her return to Holmdale, and a mother's eye was wanting to discover how unequal her strength and spirits were to the strain she put upon them. Isabel, who was now her first thought, was too much absorbed by her own thoughts to discover how intent her sister was to spare her from whatever was irksome or painful, although she was sometimes seized with a fit of vehement remorse on perceiving at the end of the day that Ruth was completely spent by fatigue and headache, and she would atone for her negligence by a good deal of superfluous activity.

CHAPTER XXX.

Still onward winds the weary way:
I with it: for I long to prove
No lapse of moons can canker love,
Whatever fickle tongues may say.

In Memoriam.

FOR the third time in one day Ruth was traversing, with slow and languid steps, the way leading from the Red House to Bean-street, when the sound of wheels, seldom heard in that narrow back street, made her look up; and she was scarcely surprised to recognise the light carriage and ponies decked with gay trappings, which were always driven by Clara or a favoured companion, and in this instance it was a relief to discover that the reins were held by herself.

"Yes, I am alone," said Clara, reading her thoughts with characteristic quickness. "Evelyn has gone to Scarborough, and we follow in two days for a family gathering — rather appalling, is it not? But one comfort is that they know already nearly all the evil there is to learn of me — or, perhaps more. So I intended to solace myself by a talk with you, at any rate, and now it is absolutely necessary. I stopped at the Red House, and then started in pursuit. Now please get in."

"It is not worth while for the few steps I have to go," said Ruth.

"To Bean-street? I fall into a little frenzy of wrath and impatience when I think that you are to be immured in that dungeon, when you might have revelled in the rural beauties of our charming cottage. Are you not afraid of being haunted?"

"Not at all," said Ruth, gravely. "Please don't keep me, Clara, for I have so much to do. We are to move to-morrow."

"Still you must spare me one little half hour — just to drive along the road and back," said Clara. "You will think it worth while, when you hear the great news I have to tell."

Deeper shades of care gathered on Ruth's anxious brow, as she asked, with sudden alarm —

"Is it about David? We have not had a line from him since he parted from Isabel."

"Get into the carriage and you shall hear," replied Clara; and as Ruth complied with her desire, she flourished her whip with an air of triumph. "No, it is *not* about David. I will tell you more when we get off the stones."

Ruth sat silent; and as soon as they turned out of the town into a road sodden and wet with decaying leaves, Clara spoke with another glittering smile.

"I should like to tease you a little. You look so sedate and unconscious. My news concerns one about whom you used to care more than about David."

Maidenly dignity forbade Ruth to utter the name which trembled on her lips, and her face was expressionless in its enforced repose.

"You know who I mean, Ruth, though you are too discreet to speak; and I know that you have never quite forgiven my behaviour to Mr. Clinton. But we shall not be rivals now."

"Clara, what do you mean?" Ruth asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"Only this. Mr. Dunn came post haste to Dyne Court this morning to tell that 200*l.*, some odd pounds and pence, making up the interest for the four years, has been paid into papa's account. Mr. Dunn was most charmed by the trait of paying interest — so characteristic of the young man's business-like habits and scrupulous honesty in making restitution. Any one might have paid the principal, he said. Now, is my news worth hearing?"

"But about Jasper himself?" said Ruth, struggling with a choking sensation in her throat.

"We know no more than you, possibly not so much; at least, Mr. Dunn hinted that you might give some clue if you chose. He is determined to ferret out the mystery, which is now obscure enough. The money was paid by some London bank, acknowledgment requested, and a memorandum added to

the effect that all inquiries would be in vain. But, at least, you can tell in what quarter of the world he is to be found."

"I know nothing," said Ruth.

Clara looked disappointed for a moment, but observed, on reflection —

"It is just as well; for in that case everything is left to my imagination. I cannot quite determine whether he has been digging gold in California or Australia; but it does not much signify. He will make his appearance some day with a long beard, a revolver, and a bowie-knife, and constitute you guardian of his gold sacks. Now, seriously, Ruth, don't you think he will come back?"

"No," said Ruth, slowly. "If the dread of dishonour has exiled him all these years, he will not now return. For the stain still rests on his name, and people will say that he admits his guilt in the act of making restitution."

"Of course he took the money; but that is such an old story now that it makes no impression, and there is something chivalrous and romantic in giving it back, especially since he probably wants it much more than papa. I believe that he has only made restitution, as you call it, because it might not otherwise be convenient to appear in Holmdale, even with the disguise of beard and bowie-knife. But I declare that you don't look at all elated, though I thought that I had for once found out something to please you."

"I *am* glad," said Ruth, trying to smile, "and it was kind of you to come and tell me. But now, please, let us drive back to Bean-street; or, if it is inconvenient, I can get out and walk."

Clara turned her ponies' heads, and before they re-entered the town she drew aside the crape veil which intercepted her view of Ruth's features, and she ascertained that, though paler than usual, there was no other trace of agitation.

"I thought," she said, "that you might be thinking of Jasper Clinton, and that made you so silent; but I know you look so cold and stern because you still bear malice, and cannot endure to be with me, even for five minutes."

"No, indeed, it is not that," said Ruth, earnestly.

"Otherwise," continued Clara, "you would have consented to take the cottage, instead of settling in that doleful house. How do you think Isabel will get on without a garden?"

"I am afraid she will miss it; but it cannot be helped."

"It might have been helped. I intended papa to give you at least an acre of ground besides grass for a cow."

"I know that you wished to give us much more than I should have felt comfortable in accepting."

"That is just as I said. You dislike me too much to let me help you in any way, and you must confess that you took this house in a fit of perversity."

"I did not take it. The Doctor thought that we could not do better."

"The Doctor!" repeated Clara. "That reminds me of an absurd report which Evelyn picked up somewhere, that the Doctor intends to supplant the gold-digger. It must only be a fancy of his own, for I am sure that you could never fall in love with a man whose coat is so badly made."

"Ah, Clara!" said Ruth, touching her crape trimmings with a trembling hand, "if nothing else, surely these should teach you that such flippancy words are out of season."

"I am sorry," said Clara; "there must be some fatality to make me say whatever most vexes you. You will be glad to hear that we are going away for at least two months."

Ruth did not deny it; yet she returned Clara's parting caress with warmth, feeling that her levity could not even now wholly estrange her from the place she had won in her affections. She turned into the house, almost glad to find no leisure to analyse the thoughts and feelings hurrying through her brain. The upholsterer's man was awaiting her directions about the final arrangement of the furniture, the carrier demanded payment for the conveyance of their goods, and Sarah claimed her attention for a list of grievances, beginning with the darkness of the kitchen, and ending with the black-beetles in the scullery.

"We have never been accustomed to such things," she said,

severely; "and, considering how high Mrs. Clinton's Martha held her head, it is very discreditable to the family." Ruth could only say, in extenuation, that Martha did not build the kitchen, and that the black beetles might have founded their colony since she gave up the house, two years ago.

In compliance with Sally's urgent entreaties, who was still working among the house-linen by the light of one flaring candle, Ruth set out to return home soon after dark. Sadly tired, and harassed in mind and body, she passed through the quiet streets which led to the old house that was to be their home no more. It was another thought, however, which brought the tears to her eyes and the expression of wistful sadness to her mouth, and caused her to throw a startled glance on the few persons she met or passed, though the growing darkness made it almost impossible to distinguish their features.

"He may be near," she thought, "and yet so far from me. That fancy is so wearing, though I ought to be satisfied, since I have all I craved for in the knowledge that he is living and free from debt. I must thank God, and be patient."

The outer air was soft and still, yet Isabel was cowering over the fire in the dismantled room, and Ruth could see the tears glistening on her cheek.

"I was just coming to look for you, Ruth," she said remorsefully. "I should not have stayed here if I had known there was so much to do."

"I have not been at work all this time," said Ruth; "I was delayed by Clara."

"I have had some society too," said Isabel; "Mr. Dunn came in soon after you left, and was rather disposed to follow you to Bean-street; but I did not encourage the idea, for I imagine that it was only some question about the house, which he thought me too young and inexperienced to answer."

"Most likely it was to tell me what I have just heard from Clara," said Ruth; and she proceeded to tell of the recovery of the 200*l*.

Isabel evinced more interest in the matter than her sister

had done. "Now," she said, exultingly, "you may triumph over the sinister predictions of Holmdale, and Jasper will come to clear himself. And the Doctor will be pleased too — at least I hope so; but he has been so odd lately that I cannot always follow him. He found me in the garden this afternoon, where I had gone to gather all the flowers which are left; and I suppose I was looking rather disconsolate, for after one or two disjointed remarks, he entreated me to confide in him as a brother. If he had said grandfather, it would have been more to the purpose."

The last words were spoken with a touch of her old playfulness, and Ruth tried to answer with a smile; but in the effort all self-control was swept away, and she hid her face and burst into tears. *She* was at no loss to understand the Doctor's words, and her perception of his meaning was accompanied by an indignant revulsion of feeling, as the truth flashed upon her that he was cherishing hopes which no time could enable her to fulfil.

"Mamma, mamma!" she said, in broken accents, unheeding Isabel's passionate entreaties to tell her what she had said to wound her. "Oh, mamma! what would you have me do?"

Isabel was terrified by Ruth's ungovernable emotion, and the sight of her uneasiness helped her sister to check her hysterical sobs.

"That will do, dear," she said, retaining Isabel's hand, when she was going to fetch a glass of water; "I shall not be so foolish again; only I was tired, and easily overset."

"But by what?" said Isabel, anxiously. "I do not know how I have vexed you."

"I will tell you," Ruth said, after a moment's hesitation, "if you care to hear."

"If I care! but you may well ask, Ruth, for I know that I have been very selfish and forgetful of you. That was the reason you called so piteously on mamma."

"Not entirely," said Ruth, in a faltering voice; "I have tried to do what she wished, and yet it cannot be right to deceive Dr. Berkeley, or to suffer him to deceive himself."

Isabel was more perplexed than before by this allusion to the Doctor; and her sister went on to explain the matter in a grave, composed way, as if she had no personal interest in it, for her habitual self-possession had been shaken only for a moment, and then resumed its sway.

"You see, Isabel, or at least you might have seen, that Dr. Berkeley wished to make you his sister by making me his wife. He told mamma, who wished it also, and so I promised to wait, and he will not press me; he has scarcely even alluded to it, and I am afraid his forbearance will only make it more difficult and painful to undeceive him at last. For I know that I shall never love him."

Isabel's natural truthfulness and courage were, in this instance, aided by bitter experience, and she saw but one issue from this dilemma. "Then you should tell him so at once," she said; "anything is better than feeding false hopes."

"And you see no difficulty in having to speak first?" said Ruth, smiling faintly.

"At least it is not a difficulty which need interfere with what is right. Perhaps the Doctor has a glimmering consciousness that he is in a false position as a lover, for it really is a mistake, considering how paternal his manner always was. At first there will be a little disappointment, but we shall soon return to our old relations, and you will be much more comfortable for having got over the explanation."

"If it *were* over," said Ruth. "But I am afraid that he is more in earnest, and will feel the disappointment more bitterly than you think."

"If you really pity him so much," Isabel began, rather mischievously; but she was checked by the expression of pain on her sister's countenance.

"You must not talk of it, Isabel; I am very miserable, but quite resolved. My mind will never alter; but there is my promise to mamma not to decide hastily."

"Mamma would wish you to do what is right," said Isabel; and the simple, straight-forward answer dispelled her sister's

doubts. She replied that she would take the first opportunity of putting an end to the present suspense.

That opportunity was afforded to her before her resolution had time to falter. The sisters were sitting together after tea, when the Doctor's well-known knock made Ruth start and shiver; but she only said, "You will not mind taking your work up-stairs;" and Isabel gathered her occupations together, and was gone before Dr. Berkeley entered. Ruth scarcely looked up from her work, and he said, nervously —

"I am afraid that you will think me an intruder on this last evening, when you have so much to do and think of. But since Dunn missed you, I could not resist coming to tell his news."

"I am glad that you have come," said Ruth, quietly; "but I have already heard of Jasper Clinton."

"It must have given you pleasure, although the restitution is almost as mysterious as the former part of the story. Dunn says that Sir John is very desirous to trace Clinton, for the sake of assuring him that everything will be passed over, if he should wish to return and make a fresh start in this country."

"It shows great forbearance on Sir John's part to remit the sentence of transportation," said Ruth, not without bitterness, since her trustful love rebelled against the supposition that such an act of forgiveness was required; "but I hardly think that Jasper is likely to avail himself of it."

"I should not advise him to do so. If he came back to England, even if he settled far from this neighbourhood, he could never be secure from having the story cast up against him. But still I wish that it were possible to trace him."

"So every one says," answered Ruth, impatiently, "as if I could help them. Yet I know nothing, and only guess that he went to America, and that is a wide word."

"I will take care that Dunn does not annoy you with inquiries," said Dr. Berkeley; and Ruth was ashamed of her irritation, and conscious how little she deserved his considerate watchfulness.

"I did not want to see you about Jasper," she said, colouring

deeply; and the Doctor caught at her meaning without venturing to acknowledge it.

"Well?" he said, breathlessly.

"I only wished to say that it seems better to speak plainly, instead of going on as we are now. It is only painful and harassing, and it must come to the same end at last. I know that it is impossible —"

"Oh, Ruth!" exclaimed Dr. Berkeley; "you promised to give me time, and it is cruel to crush my first faint hopes before I have confessed them. Any suspense is better than such a certainty; and even if it ends at last in disappointment, I alone must bear the blame."

"Yet, for my sake," said Ruth, "you must let me recall my word. Think me weak, ungrateful; yet if you knew how it would lighten other trials to know that I am free —"

Dr. Berkeley looked up with a quick, penetrating glance — "Ah, Ruth! had there been no tidings of Jasper Clinton, you would never have exacted this concession; you would have waited, as you promised."

Ruth covered her face with her hands to hide the indignant blushes. "It is cruel," she said, "to urge that promise on me — wrung from me at a time when I could deny *her* nothing. And if Jasper were dead — as he is dead to me — sooner or later my answer must have been the same, though it may be that what I heard to-day forced upon me the truth that I was only trifling with one who deserves such love as I shall never feel."

"At least for me. It is enough; and in time I may be able to thank you for having awakened me so soon from my presumptuous dream, though now it seems hard to part from all which made life sweet. God bless you, dear Ruth; let me call you so but once before my lips are sealed to that name for evermore."

With gentle force he drew down one of the hands which covered her face, and retained it for a moment in his nervous grasp. Before Ruth gained courage to look up he was gone, leaving her perplexed and miserable, and humiliated in his eyes

and her own by the admission which he had wrung from her of the nature of her feelings towards Jasper Clinton. "And yet it is well," she thought; "for he must feel contempt as well as anger, and when he despises, he must soon cease to love or regret me."

Isabel only waited for the closing of the house-door to come down, her looks full of eager curiosity, which her sister had no heart to satisfy. "You must not ask me, dear," she said; "I can only tell you that it is all over, and that I have estranged from us almost the only real friend we had. But we must try to leave all vexing thoughts behind in the old house, and apply ourselves 'with hearts new braced' to make a fresh start in life."

CHAPTER XXXI.

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.

Richard III.

"I MUST say, Ruth," said Miss Perrott, looking round, "that you have made the room look very nice, only the Indian cabinet takes up too much space."

"So it did even in the Red House," said Ruth; "but it was an old friend, and we did not like to part with it."

It was not the first time the criticism had been made and answered, for it was now within a few days of Christmas, and the Lennoxes had been settled in their new abode for more than three weeks.

"You are not so constant to *all* old friends," resumed Miss Perrott; "at least if there is any truth in the report of some coolness between you and the Doctor. Indeed, there must be something in it, for I met him in the Highstreet just now, and mentioned that I was coming here, and he hoped that you were both pretty well. In old times he would have come to inquire for himself; besides, he is going away for the Christmas holidays, a thing which never happened before; he has always made such a point of eating his Christmas dinner with you."

"We are not much disposed for merry-making this year," said Ruth.

"I am sure that there is nothing merry about the Doctor," retorted Miss Perrott; "people all remark that he is unusually absent and out of spirits, and he is just the sort of man to take a misunderstanding to heart. I suppose it is some foolish jealousy of his appointment to be Isabel's guardian; she was always so self-willed and impatient of control."

"It is the last thing you can accuse her of now," said Ruth, sadly; "I only wish that I could see a trace of her old spirits."

"She is changed, indeed," replied Miss Perrott, and her tone was somewhat softened; "but the self-will is the same as ever in giving way as she does. She ought to live with other people instead of roaming over the country by herself: and I don't believe she gives you any help in your parish work."

"I have no doubt she would if I asked her," said Ruth.

"Then you ought to ask her. It would be much more wholesome for her than indulging her love of seclusion; but you always did spoil her."

"And now it is too late to mend."

"I tell you what would rouse her better than anything," continued Miss Perrott, whose interest in the two sisters was genuine, if not always considerate; "and that is a visit from David. He ought to come and help you over Christmas, which is always a sad time after a loosening of old ties, as even I could tell you, though it is so long since I have known a family gathering."

"Yes, I wish David could have come," said Ruth; "but I had a line from him to-day to say that there would be no use applying for leave, as so many of the officers are away."

"He has as good a right as another, and I dare say that he might have got leave if he had chosen to exert himself. But I suppose that he does not like to put himself in the way of Dyne Court again."

"Dyne Court is empty, you know," said Ruth; "and the Gascoignes do not return before Parliament meets, but go from Scarborough to London."

"Oh! so you still correspond with Miss Gascoigne?"

"Yes; I heard from her last week."

"And are she and Captain Gascoigne together?"

"No; he is with the regiment at Gibraltar. He does not sell out until the marriage takes place in the spring."

"I shall be surprised if it ever takes place at all," said Miss Perrott. "At least, Mr. Dunn, who ought to know, seems to think that Captain Gascoigne is quite as volatile in his tastes as the young lady, and that is saying a good deal. I am sure, my dear, that Isabel made a very lucky escape, if she would only think so."

"Indeed," said Ruth; "you don't quite understand what Isabel thinks."

"It would be very odd if I did," rejoined the old lady, tartly, "since she never *says* anything. I must confess that I feel hurt by the way she shuns an old friend like me, crossing over the street to avoid speaking to me."

Ruth was aware that any attempt to justify Isabel only aggravated the sense of her misdemeanours, and she thought it best to change the subject. "Can I do anything for you in the Netherton, Miss Perrott? I am going on my own account to give out the list for broth, and the day is too cold for you to go in and out of houses."

"If Isabel were going with you, I might ask her to do one or two things for me; but really I have not the conscience to put any more upon you, you look so overworked already."

"It is quite a mistake to think so, Miss Perrott; I assure you I never feel tired except when I sit at home."

"That is only restlessness," said Miss Perrott, with an oracular shake of the head; "and in addition to everything else, I am inclined to think that you worry yourself about Jasper Clinton. It is very singular that we can discover nothing about him; but Dr. Berkeley has heard from his friend at New York, who has promised to set inquiries on foot."

"Has Dr. Berkeley written?" said Ruth, quickly.

"You did not know that? then absolutely you and the Doctor are not on speaking terms."

"Yes we are," said Ruth, colouring; "but he has not happened to mention this."

"It is very odd; for he is quite taken up about it, and so is Sir John, moved, as Mr. Dunn thinks, by Miss Gascoigne, who took up the matter very eagerly. Among them all they must discover some clue."

"But about your broth-tickets," said Ruth, making another attempt to recall her discursive companion. "I think Mrs. Wood and John Ball are both in your district; and Mr. Mayne said they were both to be put on the list."

"Mr. Mayne is very much deceived in John Ball," said Miss Perrott; and, in vindicating her opinion, she forgot the more exciting topics of Jasper Clinton and the Doctor.

Ruth had striven hard, and not unsuccessfully, to create for herself new interests in working among the neglected poor of the district allotted to her; but it had been up-hill work. Mr. Mayne was young and energetic, and perhaps a little indiscreet, and he had collected his staff of ladies without sufficiently considering whether they would work together; and several of those who had begun with most zeal already discovered that the system of visiting he enforced, together with the meetings at his house, consumed more time than they could spare from domestic duties. Every one thought that Miss Lennox, who had no home ties, might undertake one more street; and as she could not resist the appeal made by Mr. Mayne in his distress, before Christmas came, almost the whole of the Netherton, in which the poorer inhabitants congregated, had been thrown upon her hands. She had undertaken more than she could accomplish with any satisfaction to herself; and, as Miss Perrott hinted, she received little assistance from her sister.

Isabel began with great spirit, but she was soon discouraged by the nature of the work. The people were unused to be visited, and she was repelled, either by their surly independence, or by clamorous demands for soup and coal-tickets; and she could not allow that the discovery of one or two more promising households repaid them for a long disappointing round, especially since Ruth was so easily satisfied as to think well of a woman

who wore a black cap and artificial flowers, and spoke with a pure London accent. So she soon ceased to accompany Ruth with any alacrity, and the elder sister had no heart to interfere with her evident inclination for a solitary walk, and generally declared that she could accomplish the visits by herself. It was one of the occasions when Ruth missed Dr. Berkeley's counsel. He might have decided whether it was injudicious to indulge Isabel's desire of solitude; and he, too, she thought, might have discovered that her strength was severely tasked by the duties imposed upon her.

"And yet I could not give them up," she thought. "It is better to be weary with too much work than too much thought, and I have even now more time than enough for selfish repining. I wonder if the Doctor will be as successful in his researches this time as when he wrote to Sydney. I can hardly wish it, for I believe that it would be unmixed pain to Jasper to be brought amongst us again."

Ruth was startled from these speculations by observing Dr. Berkeley himself on the other side of the street, and she instinctively quickened her pace, and drew down her veil. But the Doctor did not as usual second her endeavours to avoid a meeting, and he crossed the street after a moment's irresolution, his look and tone deprecating her displeasure when he addressed her.

"I could not," he said, "help asking if I can do anything for you in the town. You seem tired and not fit to walk."

The expression of sympathy for which Ruth had craved a moment before, was now only embarrassing, and she answered hurriedly —

"Oh, no, I am not tired; at least, the fresh air is pleasant. And I am only going into the Netherton."

"Mayne says that you are his only efficient visitor. But I hope that he does not overwork you."

"I like it," said Ruth; and then perceiving that Dr. Berkeley was wounded by her brief reply, she made an effort to throw off constraint. "Where are you to pass Christmas, Dr. Berkeley? I hear that you are going away."

"I do not know or care," he replied. "I only felt that it would not do to stay here."

There was another pause, and Ruth considered that Miss Perrott's plain speaking was less harassing than these half sentences. While calculating what streets she must traverse before she could reach the first house in her district, and so free herself from her companion, Dr. Berkeley spoke again.

"You might trust me, Miss Lennox. On one point I shall never speak again, and therefore it seems hard that I should be debarred from all subjects which interest you."

"I know," Ruth answered, in an unsteady voice, "that you do not even now despise me, or give me up as I deserve; and I would thank you, if I dared, for your exertions in Jasper's behalf."

"You have heard that?" said Dr. Berkeley; "and you can guess that it is on your account that I am chiefly anxious to ascertain his fate."

"Thank you, very much. It would be a relief to know, though it does not really concern me. And, after all, certainty is sometimes worse than suspense."

"True," said Dr. Berkeley, in a tone which betrayed that he had taken the words home. Ruth hurriedly resumed—

"I cannot suppose that there is any chance of discovering Jasper in such a place as America after the lapse of so many years."

"So I am afraid my New York friend will say. But, since I wrote to him, it occurred to me that it might be worth while to send him an advertisement to publish in all the leading papers. And I wished to consult you in what form the appeal should be cast, and if it would be too great a liberty to use your initials."

"Oh, that would never do," said Ruth, drawing back.

"And why not, Miss Lennox?"

"I mean that it would be of no use. He may have forgotten the initial letters of my name, since I have no claim to his recollection."

"No claim!—when you have cherished his memory through
Still Waters.

all these years, and done your utmost to shield his name from dishonour. And yet you are content to believe that he has forgotten your own."

"It might be best for both," said Ruth; "but you do not and cannot understand what I mean, and I would rather wait and let things take their course."

"And you think me only officious to have stirred in the matter?"

"No, indeed," said Ruth, tearfully; "but I wish that you would not trouble yourself about what I think. I do not deserve, and I am not worth it."

"Well, good-bye," said the Doctor, stopping abruptly at the corner of the street; and Ruth walked on, with a heart no lighter for a conversation which had not conduced to place their intercourse on a pleasanter footing than before. His exertions to trace Jasper awakened a sense of shame which made the burden of gratitude doubly oppressive; she felt that anger and estrangement would have been more tolerable than such manly and noble forbearance. But she cast the thought aside for the present, reserving it for future meditation, and applied herself to the work before her with the regular and methodical exactness which had so often provoked Clara Gascoigne's raillery.

By the time Ruth reached the last house on her list it was growing dusk, and the firelight streamed with a ruddy glow through the lattice and half-open door. A little maid was rocking the baby's cradle on the hearth with an elder sister's proud tenderness, and she said that "mother was out;" but in mother's absence she was disposed to make the visitor welcome, and soon became confidential, unfolding a good deal of family history. Father's work was slack, and 'taters were dear, so they had only bread and dripping for dinner; and they all slept down-stairs, as the loft was let to help out the rent.

"And have you a lodger now?" Ruth asked.

"Yes," said the child, lowering her voice; "and the gentleman is at home."

Ruth smiled at the term which had so often offended Isabel,

who vindicated for herself the privilege of being called a woman, simply as a mark of gentility. "Then he is out of work too," she said.

"He is ill, and so off work; but mother don't think he ever was given to do much, for his hands are soft and white like the real gentlefolk; and though he has only a fustian jacket, his shirts are finer than father's best."

"And how does he pay his rent?" Ruth asked, insensibly becoming interested in a story to which she had at first listened out of complaisance for Bessy.

"He promised to pay by the week, and he has been here ten days; so father spoke to him about it, and he said he should look for work when he was better: and then he gave him a gold ring in pledge — real gold — and made father promise not to part with it. I can show it to you if you like."

"Your father might not like you to meddle with it," said Ruth; but the little damsel assured her, with a staid and sensible air, that father would not mind; he had only put it into the tobacco-box on the high chest of drawers, to be out of the children's way. And by climbing on the polished arm-settle she succeeded in reaching the treasure in question, and producing it for Ruth's inspection.

It was a plain seal ring; and as Ruth leaned forward so as to throw the firelight upon the bloodstone, she perceived that the crest of a talbot's head was engraved upon it. A strange, wild, and improbable idea darted through her brain: this was the Clinton crest, and she reminded herself in vain that it was a common device. "What is his name?" she asked, hurriedly; but she wondered at her own folly in expecting any satisfaction from the reply. Yet a name so little distinctive as "John Brown" gave colour to the supposition that it might be assumed.

"Is he a tall man?"

"Yes; a bit taller than father."

"And what colour is his hair?"

"His hair is dark, like yours."

Again Ruth's heart leaped; she remembered how, in days

gone-by, Isabel had laid a lock of her hair beside Jasper's, and bade her observe that there was not a shade of difference between them. Bessy Lawes wondered how long the lady meant to stay, and why she continued to sit beside the fire, mechanically moving the ring up and down on her slender finger; but the result of her meditations presently appeared.

"Bessy," she said, looking up, "would you ask Mr. Brown if he would like to see me? — since he is ill, and out of work, I might be of use to him."

"Mother told me to mind baby," said the little girl, hanging her head.

"I will mind him till you come down," said Ruth.

There was a pause before Bessy found courage to reveal the true cause of her reluctance — "Please, I think you had best go yourself. Mother says he does not like children, and if we go near the room he speaks so rough-like, and orders us down."

"I will go myself," said Ruth; and Bessy lighted a candle with great alacrity to guide her up the steep and narrow stair.

No answer was returned to Ruth's low and uncertain knock; but when she tried the door, which was fastened, there was a sullen inquiry who was there.

"It is I," said Ruth, softly. When she would have told her name, the words died on her lips. She waited, and presently there was a sound of heavy steps crossing the creaking floor; the bolt was withdrawn, the door thrown back, and the owner of the ring, whoever he might be, stood before her.

Ruth was scarcely conscious of a sickening sense of disappointment — it was so soon swallowed up in alarm. The dim light of her flickering candle revealed a man of almost gigantic proportions, his naturally powerful frame evidently contracted by wasting sickness; his features were strong, a fierce light gleamed in his hollow eye, and there was something animal in the expression of the mouth. Yet Ruth was haunted by a strange, indefinable resemblance to Jasper Clinton, which made her shiver. She was reassured in observing that not want and

care alone, but time, had furrowed the deep lines round the mouth and eyes, and streaked the bushy hair with grey. She repeated to herself that the likeness existed only in her imagination, and yet at that moment she would have thanked God for the certainty that Jasper Clinton was dead.

"What do you want?" the stranger asked; and Ruth was scarcely prepared to reply to the question put in a tone of defiance.

"I visit here," she said, with hesitation; "I heard you were ill, and I thought you might need help."

"Have I asked for help?" returned the man; adding with a smile, more repulsive than his rudeness, "however, I am not one to refuse a good offer. I do want help — money — I am starving with cold and hunger."

Ruth glanced round the little garret, and its appearance bore out his words. There was no fire in the grate, and the keen wind sighed and moaned through the unceiled rafters of the roof, and flapped to and fro the tattered curtains of the bed, which was literally the only article of furniture in the room, with the exception of a wooden chest and one rickety chair. The Christmas gifts of that day had almost exhausted the contents of Ruth's purse, but she pressed the little that remained into the man's hand, as she said, "It is all I have with me; you had better make a fire, and come to our house this evening for some broth — three, Bean-street."

The hand which had greedily closed upon the silver, relaxed its grasp, and Ruth was terrified by the tumult of passion which swept over that haggard face — whether of anger, shame, or remorse she could not tell.

"Three, Bean-street!" he repeated, through his set teeth — "to hell rather!" He wrenched the door from her hand, and secured it on the inside against further intrusion.

The interview had been long enough for Ruth. In observing the effect of her last words, the truth had flashed upon her: since it was not Jasper Clinton, it could only be his father, and in his presence she could not breathe freely; she must have leisure to think, and to determine how to act. She passed

hastily through the outer room, where Bessy awaited her return in some anxiety, and only bade her good-night, saying that she should come again on the morrow.

Alone, and in the deepening twilight, she hoped to recover some composure; but it was not to be. She could only restlessly count over the circumstances in favour of her conviction that this was the elder Clinton. Everything confirmed the surmise; the coincidence of the crest, his anxiety to shun observation, the emotion to which her reference to the old house in Bean-street had given rise; above all, and Ruth shivered at this added proof, the strange resemblance to Jasper, overlaid, yet not wholly defaced, by the traces stamped upon his features of a life of crime and reckless dissipation. For Jasper's sake he must not be left in the destitution to which he was reduced; for his own sake, also, as Ruth thought, with pitying tenderness, since the hollow cough still rang in her ears, which betrayed that the hand of death was upon him. Then came a sense of powerlessness, and the craving for counsel by which she was so often visited. She feared to take any step which might lead either to his detection or to his departure, in order to avoid suspicion, and she felt wholly unequal to the attempt of gaining influence over a man of hardened and desperate character. She began to be afraid, also, that she must soon give way to the feelings of illness against which she had struggled so long. She felt that the shock of the discovery she had just made was hardly enough to account for the lassitude by which she was overpowered, and this languor was accompanied by that peculiar sensation which often precedes illness, when the nerves quiver and the pulses throb with suppressed and latent suffering.

There was one alternative, which she embraced with reluctance, and that was an appeal to Dr. Berkeley. As soon as she returned home, she dispatched a note to him, before giving her aching head the repose it so much needed.

"Bean-street, Tuesday.

DEAR DR. BERKELEY, — After parting from you, I went to the Lawes's cottage in Lovelane, and I found a man lodging

there, whom I believe to be Jasper's father, Mr. Clinton. I did not tell him my suspicions, for he evidently wishes to remain concealed; nor do I know what I ought to do. He is very ill, if not dying, and in great want. Perhaps you will not mind coming here to-morrow, to advise me what to do. And, even if you do mind, I believe you will come, little as I deserve it.

"Yours truly,

"RUTH LENNOX."

Dr. Berkeley replied by a verbal message, promising prompt compliance; but when he asked for Miss Lennox on the following morning, he was informed that she was too ill to see him. He was still in parley with Sally, when Mr. Ball came down the stair with an anxious face.

"Yes," he said, "it promises to be a serious illness, and I have no doubt that it has been brewing for some time. She has a good deal of fever, and wandered through the night, and now she is talking incessantly, chiefly of her mother, poor thing, in a confused, incoherent way, which shows what a strain there has been upon the mind. But I still hope to avert brain-fever."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A roofless ruin lies my home,
For winds to blow, and rains to pour,
One frosty night befel, and lo.
I find my summer days are o'er:
The heart bereaved, of why and how
Unknowing, knows that yet before
It had, what e'en to memory now
Returns no more — no more.

A. H. CLOUGH.

"A BRAIN fever," "the illness has been brewing for some time." Isabel had been leaning over the balusters to catch Mr. Ball's words, and she carried them back with her to the sick room. The sentence almost paralysed her, and already she

felt so helpless, shrinking in childish terror from Ruth's incoherent words, and yet jealous of suffering any other to share the charge, and aid in carrying out Mr. Ball's directions. All was done — the long dark hair cut away from the temples to make way for cooling applications, every ray of light excluded from the room, and nothing remained but to sit and watch.

Ruth never ceased speaking in the low, hurried tone which betrays the delirium of fever. Her mother's name recurred most frequently, whom she imagined to be lying in the adjoining room, requiring her attendance; and she entreated Isabel with piteous earnestness to allow her to rise. But as the attempt to move brought a rush of pain to her head, she sank back on the pillow, saying faintly, "I cannot go — but shut both doors, lest mamma should be disturbed by the throbbing of my temples!" and this delusion availed more to still her restlessness than all Isabel's soothing words.

To some of her sister's confused sayings Isabel possessed no clue; she could not understand the repeated allusions to the sick man in Love-lane, Ruth's anxiety to know if the Doctor had seen him, and if he would keep the secret; and even in delirium she forbore, with strange self-control, to utter the name that trembled on her lips. Isabel could not trace the connexion between this incident and Jasper Clinton, and indeed she forgot to do so in the painful interest awakened by the revelation of the deep yearnings which lay beneath her sister's impassive manner. Conjectures locked up for years within her breast were now poured forth by Ruth without restraint. She said that Jasper was dead — that his spirit was crushed by that sense of irremediable dishonour which makes life a living death — that he had returned to make his honour plain — that he still loved, and would marry Clara. "And thinking of him as I did," she continued, in the belief that she was addressing her mother, "you must not think too hardly of my behaviour to Dr. Berkeley. It was wrong to make the engagement, but it would have been worse to keep it, after the conviction had been brought home that I could never forget Jasper, or think of another in

the same way. Oh, mamma! when first you learned how I loved him, you only pitied me, and were not angry; will you not still bear with me?" It seemed that she was ever haunted by the dread of having incurred her mother's displeasure.

Trials no less heavy than her own were revealed to Isabel; but borne, as she acknowledged, with a keen sense of remorse, in a different spirit. Ruth had appeared to be content and even cheerful, full of interest in the thoughts and pursuits of others; and Isabel had never dreamed of the struggle by which such self-control was attained. And now, in bitterness of spirit, she understood Mr. Ball's allusion to that strain upon the mind, which, so far from relieving, she must have aggravated by her self-willed indulgence to listlessness and despondency.

Isabel felt as if she had been sitting by that bedside for years, instead of hours, when, late in the afternoon, Sally reminded her that the post would go out in half an hour, and asked if she did not mean to write to Mr. David. She complied with the suggestion, glad that the time made it necessary that her letter should be brief. Since Mr. Ball had not certainly pronounced it a case of brain fever, she would not put her forebodings into shape by using the alarming words. She wrote that Ruth was ill and feverish, and that Mr. Ball seemed uneasy about her, and she entreated David to apply for leave, and come to them at once.

"I want you so much," she added, plaintively. She counted the hours which must intervene before David could receive and act upon her letter. They went heavily by, and wrought little change in Ruth, except that the violence of the delirium subsided. Her mind still wandered when she spoke; but for the most part she lay in a sort of stupor, less harassing to her attendants; yet Mr. Ball evidently did not regard this as a more hopeful symptom.

On the evening of the second day Isabel accompanied the doctor half way down-stairs, in order to hear his evasive answer to her breathless inquiries. He could not say his patient was worse, nor yet much better, and he did not anticipate any

change for some days. Isabel returned his good night as well as her parched lips would allow, and attempted to return to her sister's room; but her trembling limbs refused to carry her farther, and she sank down on the stair, and sobbed convulsively. She was sick at heart, hopeless, and bodily weary; for she had not spared herself as an older and more experienced nurse would have done. She had taken no rest, and scarcely tasted food since Ruth was taken ill. She was roused by hearing Sally in colloquy with some person at the house door. Could it be David? But in another moment she was only more dispirited to recognise Dr. Berkeley's voice.

He was trying to gain admittance, while Sally complied with the instructions which had given offence to many of their acquaintance, in repeating that Miss Isabel could see no one while her sister was so ill. It now occurred to Isabel, that Ruth had not shrunk from intercourse with others when her attendance on their mother was most harassing, and she also remembered Dr. Berkeley's peculiar claim to consideration. Not without a struggle, she resisted the impulse to escape before her position was discovered, and she rose and presented herself in the entrance passage. But she was not prepared to see Miss Perrott as well as the Doctor, and she was only restrained from a hasty retreat by Miss Perrott's voluble inquiries. She was rewarded for the effort; for, after the first pang was over, there was a certain relief in imparting to another the hopes and fears which had been locked within her breast.

"You must have met Mr. Ball," she said, after repeating the opinion he had just given.

"Yes, we met him," said Miss Perrott; "and he quite approved of my coming to help you through the nursing. He said that you will soon be as bad as your sister, if you don't take care."

"I am fit for anything," returned Isabel, quite averse to the idea that any one so nervous and helpless as Miss Perrott should share her responsibility. "And, besides, David will soon be here."

"You have sent for him?" said the Doctor. These were

the first words that he had spoken, as he stood before Isabel with folded arms, and a stony, impassive face.

"Yes; but I am afraid that I did not write strongly enough at first, or he would have come away at once. I wrote again by the early post this morning, and my letter must bring him in the course of the night."

"If not," said Dr. Berkeley, "I can easily go to York myself."

"Oh no," said Isabel, shivering at the recollection of the former journey he had undertaken on their account; "I could not ask you to do that again. And, besides, I am sure that it will not be necessary."

It was not so easy to decline Miss Perrott's good offices; and indeed arguments would not have altered her determination. She waited for no invitation to go up-stairs and settle herself, as she said; and when Isabel was about to follow her, the Doctor took and detained her hand in his tremulous grasp —

"You must not think me impertinent," he said, "if I ask whether Miss Lennox appears to have anything particular on her mind?"

Isabel was embarrassed by the question.

"She has had much to try her lately, as you know; enough, Mr. Ball thinks, to account for this illness. But now she is unconscious of everything."

"One moment more," said Dr. Berkeley; "you know the relief it would be to feel that I was of any use to you — to her."

"Pray for us," said Isabel, in a low voice, as she disengaged her hand and turned away.

Miss Perrott was already established in Ruth's room, and Isabel acknowledged with surprise and some shame, that the helpless old maid was transformed into an efficient sick nurse. She devised alleviations which had occurred to no one else, and applied them with a light and skilful hand; and when she had proved her talents, she urged Isabel to confide her sister to her care, and seek the rest of which she was in need. At first

Isabel would only consent to lie down on the sofa in the adjoining room, but Miss Perrott insisted on her going regularly to bed; and after listening for awhile to the sounds which proceeded from the sick room, and for the rattle of wheels upon the pavement, which might herald her brother's arrival, she fell into a heavy, dreamless sleep, which lasted several hours. When she awoke, Sally stood by her bedside, in the twilight of early morning.

"Oh!" said Isabel, starting up, "I have slept too long! How is she? and is David come?"

"There is no change, Mr. Ball says. Miss Lennox seems easier now, though she moaned a good deal through the night. And Mr. David has not come, but here is a letter."

Isabel seized and tore open the envelope, without perceiving that it was not directed in her brother's hand; and thus she was wholly unprepared for the information it contained.

"Prospect-place, York, Christmas Eve.

"MY DEAR MISS LENNOX, — Your brother desires me to write and let you know that nothing but his own illness could have prevented his coming to Holmdale. I hope and believe that there is no cause for serious uneasiness, and that the inflammation of the lungs which has come on in consequence of a neglected cold, will subside in a day or two. He was looking so ill when we met out hunting last week that I was scarcely surprised to hear of this attack, and as I happened to be still in the neighbourhood, I came into York at once, and I shall not leave him as long as I can be of the slightest use. By the doctor's advice we have moved him out of barracks into lodgings; and as he seems to prefer my company to that of the officers in the dépôt, with none of whom he happens to be intimate, I am installed as head nurse. His anxiety about your sister makes him an unmanageable patient, since he fancies himself fit to go over to Holmdale, which is far from being the case. So that if you should unhappily have occasion to send an unfavourable report, I trust that you will soften it as much as possible in your letters to him, and urge him not to think of

moving at present. I need not tell you what pain it gives me to be the bearer of such tidings, when you have already so much upon your mind, or assure you that I shall write constantly and fully. Lennox sends his love; and I repeat his very words — 'Tell her not to fret about me, as I am well cared for, and shall come away with all speed. And she must not overtire herself.'

"Believe me, my dear Miss Lennox,
"Ever very faithfully yours,
"EDWARD LYNMERE."

Isabel was stunned by this fresh blow. The knowledge that David was ill — seriously ill — as she gathered from the tone of the letter, rather than from any particular expression, and to be unable to go to him, was more grievous than anything she had yet had to bear. The proud and exclusive affection lavished on him in their childish years, had given place for a time to a new and more absorbing love; but it revived in full force, and she repeated wildly, that he was her first — her all — that she could not give him up. She rose and walked to the window, and then remembered, for the first time, that it was Christmas morning. It was still so early that the street was almost deserted, but the glad holiday aspect of the few passers by made Isabel's heart very full, for she felt that no Christmas joy would lighten her cares that day.

"And yet," she thought, "the spring of their gladness should be the source of our patience. Those glad-tidings were to us and to all people — peace on earth." She clasped her hands, learning the lesson brought home to all in their hour of extremest need, that she must not seek the gratification of her self-willed desires, but only for strength to bear her appointed cross.

"Well, my dear child, what now?" said Miss Perrott, as she entered the room. "Sally says she is afraid that you have some bad news from David; I was just wondering whether he could have got into some scrape to prevent his coming."

"As if it was the least likely!" returned Isabel, disdain-

fully. "David is ill, too ill to write himself, so that I have only heard from Lord Edward Lynmere;" and she put the letter into Miss Perrott's hand, although she thought her unworthy to see it, after expressing such an unwarranted suspicion.

"A very feeling letter," Miss Perrott remarked. "I dare say that he will do the best he can for your brother; but it is just like a man, to give no particulars—nothing about his pulse, or the cough, or the doctor's opinion."

"So I was thinking," said Isabel; "we know so little, and he must need woman's nursing. I don't know where I am most wanted."

"Oh," said Miss Perrott, retracting her former remark; "I have no doubt that Lord Edward will take every care of him; indeed, he says so. After all, I dare say it is nothing serious, and illness does not go hard with a strong young man like David; very different from poor Ruth, who was quite worn-out already."

"You need not think that I have forgotten Ruth," said Isabel, as the hot tears started to her eyes. "I have neglected her long enough; I only wanted to know what I ought to do."

Miss Perrott was not a little flattered that Isabel, the wilful and impetuous, should submit to her guidance. "You see," she said, "that, putting Ruth out of the question, it would not quite do for you to go off to York by yourself, to live in lodgings close by the barracks."

"As to that," returned Isabel, quickly, "no absurd notions of propriety should keep me away."

"My dear Isabel, it would have been a happy thing for you if you had paid more attention to notions of propriety. I did not mean to vex you," she added, observing Isabel's indignant colour; "young people will be thoughtless, and it is natural that you should wish to be with your brother, so attached as you have always been. But I don't know what the world would say, if you were to leave Ruth in her critical state, and go travelling across country to help this Lord Edward and half a dozen young officers, to nurse David through what may be only a bad cold; and though I should take all care of Ruth, you

would not feel comfortable if anything were to happen while you are away."

"You need not put that motive last," said Isabel; "I care for Ruth, if I care little for what the world may say, and I shall not leave her. You talk as if — as if you expected some change. Has Mr. Ball told you more than he tells me?"

"He was here at four this morning, fancying that the fever might turn; and then he wishes to be at hand, for she might sink fast, if nothing is done to uphold her strength. But he saw no change, and there has been none since, except that she moved once or twice, and called me mamma; poor dear!" And Miss Perrott's small light-blue eyes twinkled with unwonted tears.

No tears moistened Isabel's burning eyeballs, and her face grew rigid in its calmness, as she said —

"Thank you very much for watching with her. Mamma would thank you if she could. I will dress and come to her room as soon as I can, that you may go and rest."

"I tell you what will be better; that you should go to the early Communion before you take my place. You have not forgotten," Miss Perrott added, as Isabel looked irresolute, "that it is Christmas-day."

"No, I had not forgotten; but I am afraid that I should not enter into the service."

"You will, if you set your mind to it," said Miss Perrott, persuasively, "and you will feel better for it afterwards."

"I will go," said Isabel, after a pause, employed in pondering, not on the words of her companion, but upon the gracious promise made to those who are "weary and heavy laden." It was surely not a time to refuse the invitation.

Her resolution did not falter, though it cost her a struggle to pass Ruth's door without entering. Miss Perrott had so ruled, declaring that it worried the patient to have people fidgiting in and out, and Isabel was forced to acquiesce. She was sensitive to the chilliness of the morning air after her close confinement to the house, but it was rather in the hope of avoiding recognition that she drew her crape veil over her face.

The precaution did not avail her, for a bright-eyed child belonging to her Sunday class crossed the street in order to drop a curtsy, and say, in clear joyous tones —

"Please, Miss Isabel, a merry Christmas." "She looked strange," the little girl afterwards told her companions; "but I think she was going to say thank you, only she was stopped by something like a sob."

The only other Christmas greeting which Isabel received was of a different character. Dr. Berkeley joined her at the entrance of the alley of leafless limes leading up to the church; and when Isabel had answered his hurried inquiries, he seemed unable to pursue the subject, and said abruptly —

"This is different from other Christmas-days, Isabel."

"Yes; but we did not know how happy we were till it was too late. It is too late now."

"David has not come?" said the Doctor

"No; I will tell you about it afterwards," said Isabel, turning away. She would not distract her mind by dwelling on this fresh anxiety, now that she wished to lift her heart above earthly cares. The attempt was not unsuccessful. The traces of tears were still on her face when she left the church, softening its former expression of hopeless misery, and she spoke of Ruth and of her brother's illness with a sad patience.

To Dr. Berkeley her report of Lord Edward's letter appeared sufficiently alarming, yet he did not renew his offer of going to York. Perhaps the spell was irresistible which bound him to hover round that melancholy house in Bean-street, his eyes riveted on the window in the upper story, which was distinguished from the rest by its closed shutters.

CHAPTER XXXII.

I have known how sickness bends,
I have known how sorrow breaks,
How quick hopes have sudden ends,
How the heart thinks till it aches
Of the smile of buried friends.

E. B. BROWNING.

MISS PERROTT met Isabel in the passage with such a disturbed face that she asked, with sudden alarm, if Ruth was worse.

"No; but it is a mercy she is not. I have had such a piece of work since you went away."

Before Isabel could demand an explanation, the appearance of a third person fully accounted for Miss Perrott's discomposure, since it was no other than Clara Gascoigne.

"Oh, Clara!"

"Well, Isabel, you could not have looked more disturbed if you had seen a ghost."

"A ghost might be more welcome," answered Isabel, with a smile more sad than tears; "for that only speaks when it is spoken to, and does not wear such a horrible rustling silk. Is Ruth's door shut?"

"I should think so," said Miss Perrott, tersely.

"And that," exclaimed Clara, "is the most civil thing you can say, when I have come express from Scarborough to see her — grievously offending my future *belle mère*, and breaking all the engagements I made for to-morrow's ball. I positively will not stir till I have seen her."

"You must not talk so loud," said Isabel; "come down to the sitting-room." And she led the way there, leaving Miss Perrott to vacillate between indignation at Clara's inconsiderate wilfulness and reluctant admiration of her grace and beauty.

The sitting-room looked melancholy and deserted, for it had been unused since the beginning of Ruth's illness; and Clara clasped her hands with a gesture of despair — "Ah! this house

would make any one *triste*. I said so when Ruth took it. But tell me, Isabel, is she really so ill, or was it only written by Mr. Dunn, and said by Miss Perrott, from the instinct middle-aged, middle-class people have to make themselves disagreeable?"

"You must not say anything against Miss Perrott, Clara."

"Why, I am sure she was no favourite of yours. She used to be the text for Ruth's lectures on social duties."

"It is hard to remind me of all the flippant, heartless things I may have said, at a time when the recollection is already sufficiently bitter," said Isabel.

"Then tell me about Ruth," rejoined Clara, "and I will not tease you."

Isabel gave a brief account of her sister's illness, adding, "Mr. Ball says that perfect quiet is the only hope, so you must see how impossible it is for you to see her."

"I don't see it at all," answered Clara; "if she knows no one, my going in cannot disturb her more than yours. I will walk on tiptoe, and speak in whispers."

"The most disturbing thing you could do, Clara."

"Well, you need not be so contemptuous on my qualifications as nurse, for you must allow that I did her all the good in the world by carrying her off to Dyne Court. If she had stayed there, I believe she would have escaped this illness."

"I believe she would," said Isabel, tremulously; "and she came away on my account. She never spared herself when she was ill and weary, and all the while I thought only of myself. And now I can see that Mr. Ball expects the worst — yet not the worst for her. Shall I tell you, Clara, the verse she repeated over and over again the first night that she was taken ill? — 'Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest.'"

"She will not die," said Clara, recoiling from the thought.

"Do not look so unhappy, Isabel. I don't want to keep you, but you must let me have one little peep at her."

Isabel's refusal was positive, and Clara was at last induced to give up the point. She observed that, if she was to be of no

use, she might as well return to go to church with Sir John; but she was still arranging the folds of the offending silk dress, when she hazarded the first allusion to David that had been made on either side.

"I have not told you," she said, trying, but with less success than usual, to speak with an air of unconcern—"I have not told you how I met my Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance in York."

Isabel had considered Clara unworthy of sharing this additional anxiety, but she now looked up with tearful eagerness.

"You mean Lord Edward. Did he say anything of David?"

"He mentioned his illness; but I suppose you have heard by the post."

"Yes; but he may have given you more particulars. Did he seem anxious, and speak as if he was very ill?"

"To tell you the truth, he spoke rather pointedly, and seemed anxious to make the worst of it in order to awaken my compunction. As if," Clara added, lightly, "in these modern days, a disappointment in love sent people into a consumption. Why, I should be just as well and merry if I heard to-morrow that Evelyn has gone off with Miss Thomason. She is gone to Gibraltar, and, as I hear, they are flirting outrageously."

"Did he say consumption?" said Isabel, not heeding, and scarcely hearing the latter part of Clara's speech.

"I forgot whether he used the word exactly; but he implied it, solely, as I said just now, from a desire to make me uncomfortable, in which he did not at all succeed. I told him to assure Mr. Lennox that I was on my way to Holmdale, on purpose to help you to take care of Ruth, so that he might keep his mind easy. Lord Edward said dubiously, that he should not fail to deliver my message, if it was likely to have that effect — so very insulting."

"I must go up to Ruth now," said Isabel, wearily. She wondered at her own folly in supposing that it was possible for Clara to set at rest the sickening anxiety awakened by her careless words. The warnings of other years concerning the delicacy of David's constitution rose up before her, and though Lord Ed-

ward had only written of a neglected cold, little more might be needed to implant the seeds of that terrible disease.

"I did not mean to keep you," said Clara, "but you must let me sit here until the carriage comes to fetch me. I desired that it might come round in an hour."

Isabel took Miss Perrott's place by her sister's bedside, and impatiently awaited Mr. Ball's return. There was little apparent change: Ruth's breathing was still heavy and irregular; her mind as little conscious as before; her movements, if anything, rather feebler. The icy coldness of the grasp in which Isabel retained one of the restless, quivering hands seemed grateful, and in that position Isabel sat still and prayed.

The silence was broken by the doctor's slow, cautious footfall along the passage; but it was followed by a lighter step, and Isabel was dismayed, though not surprised, when Clara entered with Mr. Ball. She walked on tiptoe, as she had engaged to do, her finger on her lips, and something like a smile of triumph dimpling her cheeks. The smile died on her lips when Mr. Ball drew back the shutter in order to see his patient, and admitted a sickly ray of light into the darkened room. Nurtured in luxurious ease, and shielded from all which might shock and offend the senses, Clara was wholly unprepared for the sight which met her eyes. It was terrible to see features so familiar altered and disfigured beyond the power of recognition; the brows red and swelled, the eyes glazed, the lips parched, and, above all, the vacancy of expression. Now, however, Ruth raised her heavy eyes with something like awakening consciousness, and looked at Clara, who had pressed forward to the foot of the bed. She struggled to speak, and at length succeeded in pronouncing Clara's name articulately.

"Yes, dear," Clara answered with a sob.

"It is you," said Ruth, slowly; "I have waited so long. Now that I am so ill, you will answer and say what has become of Jasper. Perhaps he told you what he was going to do; he would have told me if you had waited."

"Indeed, Ruth, he told me nothing," said Clara, and an ex-

pression of "hope deferred" crept over Ruth's face. Before she could speak again, Mr. Ball said peremptorily —

"Take her away, Miss Isabel; this will never do. It only increases the excitement to answer her."

Isabel complied with his directions, and led Clara from the room, who had just self-control sufficient to restrain a fit of hysterics until she was outside the door. But the sounds reached Mr. Ball's ears, and he hurried out, sending Isabel back to the sick-room, and inveighing against his own folly in trusting to Clara's professions of good behaviour. He fairly frightened her out of this exhibition of feeling by administering such home truths as she had probably never heard before, or at least from none but Ruth. In a few minutes she was on her way back to Dyne Court, feeling disconsolate, ill-used, and unhappy; trying to soothe her agitated nerves, and chase away a headache with eau de Cologne, and wishing that it were equally easy to efface the image of suffering and sickness so vividly impressed upon her brain.

"I did not know how to refuse her," Mr. Ball said, apologetically, when, after resuming the examination of his patient, he summoned Isabel into the adjoining room to inform her of his opinion. "She made such a point of seeing her, and promised to behave so well; and really the quickness with which Miss Lennox recognised her was a good sign, though I was alarmed by the excitement which followed."

To this faint shadow of hope Isabel clung despairingly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Like a tree beside the river
Of her life, that runs from me,
Do I lean me, murmuring ever,
In my love's idolatry.
In my ears the siren river
Sings, and smiles up in my face;
But for ever, and for ever
Runs from my embrace.

GERALD MASSEY.

"ISABEL!" whispered Ruth.

Three days had passed. The fever had subsided; consciousness had returned; and though too weak to speak above her breath or raise her hand from the coverlet, Ruth was pronounced out of danger. Isabel bent down to catch her faint tones.

"Isabel, where is David? You must have sent for him when I was so ill; and he is not here."

"He is at York; he could not come," said Isabel.

"And you look so anxious, though I heard Mr. Ball tell you not to be anxious about me. Is anything amiss with David?"

Isabel struggled to drive back the tears which might have agitated her sister. "He has been ill; but Miss Perrot says that I am foolish and ungrateful not to trust that all will be well now that you are getting better."

Ruth's eyes demanded an explanation; and with an effort to make light of her uneasiness, Isabel detailed the particulars of her brother's illness. She need not have been so much afraid of alarming Ruth, for her excessive weakness had induced a certain languor of mind which gave no place for agitation. As one of Isabel's glossy curls fell over her face, she caressingly entwined it round her finger, as she said, "Poor child! It was good of you to stay and nurse me when you must have longed to be with David."

"I did not wish it while you were so ill. I should not think of it now, only Lord Edward writes that David is so restless and anxious to be with us, that he is afraid of his undertaking the journey before he is fit for it."

"Then you ought to go to him to keep him quiet; I want no one now but Sally."

"You will miss me a little," said Isabel, tenderly. "And, besides, Miss Perrott says that it will not do for me to go alone."

Ruth smiled faintly, to think how Isabel must have been tamed before she accepted Miss Perrott's code of propriety. But she only said, "In that case, Miss Perrott can do no less than act duenna."

Isabel repeated her objections to leaving her sister to Sally's care, and nothing more was said at the time; but when Miss Perrott herself came in to send Isabel out for a breath of fresh air, Ruth renewed the subject. "Isabel has been telling me of David's illness."

"I thought Isabel had more sense," rejoined Miss Perrott, tartly; "I beg you will not think of it, but remember that Mr. Ball wishes you to keep your mind easy. The boy has had the influenza, always very depressing; and he chooses to magnify it into a serious illness, for the sake of making himself important. Men always do."

"I have no doubt he would be much happier if he had a woman to nurse and cheer him."

"You don't mean to say," returned Miss Perrott, "that you encourage Isabel's absurd inclination to run off from her duties here to live in barracks with him, or at least in lodgings close by, which comes to the same thing. I thought that I had convinced Isabel herself that it would never do."

"She could not go, unless you will be kind enough to go with her."

Miss Perrott happily remembered the weakness of Ruth's head in time to suppress a little shriek of dismay. She had not slept a night out of Holmdale for eighteen years, and she was afraid of damp sheets, railway collisions, and all possible and impossible evils. But Ruth overruled all objections, and Miss Perrott knew not how to refuse a request made as a personal favour to Ruth herself.

"Though you have no right to ask it, my dear," she added, "for you are not in the least fit to take care of yourself."

"Mr. Ball says I have nothing to do but to lie quiet, and eat and sleep," said Ruth; "and Sally can keep the door against all intruders."

Miss Perrott observed, that if they were to go at all, the sooner the better, and she went home to make the necessary preparations for starting on the morrow. Isabel's eyes glistened when she found on her return that everything was arranged for their departure. Was Ruth sure she ought to go? And, satisfied on that point, she confessed that she thought so too. She found Lord Edward's last report still less satisfactory on a second reading, and the few lines added by David himself were written in straggling, uneven characters, which betrayed the weakness of which he complained.

When, however, the moment of departure came, Isabel clung round her sister, as if unable to tear herself away. Ruth spoke cheerfully, saying, that she meant to be well enough to make tea for her and David on their return; and with a long kiss, and a whispered entreaty that she would be prudent, Isabel hurried away. Her last words were to Sally —

"You understand that Miss Gascoigne is not to be admitted on any pretence whatever."

"Not if I can help it, Miss Isabel," said Sally, doubtfully. She had been too often baffled by Clara's pertinacity to have much confidence in her powers of resistance.

Although the journey to York only occupied two or three hours, it was wearisome enough. Miss Perrott's restlessness disturbed the equanimity of her fellow-travellers, especially those of the masculine gender; she was encumbered by more than her fair share of loose parcels, with which she was continually migrating from one seat to another, to escape imaginary draughts, and she was at last constrained to tie a three-cornered shawl over her bonnet, as a silent reproach to the strong-minded person who insisted on putting down part of the window. Isabel gave a mechanical assent to her querulous reminiscences of the greater deference paid to ladies in her younger days; but all the while her thoughts were straying between the sick room she had left and the one to which she was hastening.

"I hope Lord Edward will meet us; it will be awkward if we have to call a cab for ourselves," said Miss Perrott, as the train slackened speed to enter the station at York.

"We shall do very well," said Isabel; but as she spoke she descried Lord Edward's tall, erect figure on the platform. She had last seen him in the dining-room at Wentworth Lodge, and the recollection came full upon her amid a storm of mingled feeling which it was difficult to subdue. Yet, if her heart swelled, her voice was calm and quiet, as she said, "I am sorry that you should have troubled yourself to come and meet us; I only wrote to tell you of our coming, for fear it might startle David."

"Your letter was a great relief," said Lord Edward, "for, though you must not think me weary of my charge, I feel that Lennox needs a sister's nursing. Unfortunately his lodgings are too confined to take you in, but I have engaged rooms for you within a few minutes' walk."

"The luggage!" interposed Miss Perrott, piteously; "the train will certainly go off with it — two boxes and a bag — I must go and look after it!"

"Pray do not move," said Lord Edward, with ready courtesy; "I am sure that I can find it. Two boxes and a bag, did you say, Miss Perrott?"

"Very well bred!" remarked Miss Perrott, as Lord Edward started on his quest; "but I wondered at you, Isabel, that you could go on making civil speeches, without thinking of the luggage or so much as asking after David."

"I did not dare," said Isabel, in a low tone, which did not reach her companion's ears. Lord Edward presently returned; and in a few minutes they were seated in the fly, which he directed should go round by Sheet-street, to leave their goods, before proceeding to Prospect-place.

"Including me, I suppose," said Miss Perrott, with a little, short laugh, which disconcerted Lord Edward. After a moment's hesitation between sincerity and politeness, he said frankly —

"I believe it would be better. Lennox has one or two sick fancies, and among them is a dislike to new faces."

A half-uttered soliloquy, "that her face was old enough," betrayed Miss Perrott's inclination to be offended; but she thought better of it, and observed, that she could make things comfortable before Isabel's return.

She was left to execute her intentions and to pay the flyman, while Isabel set out with Lord Edward to walk to Prospect-place. Alone with him, she found courage to make the inquiries which had faltered on her lips.

"Will you tell me, Lord Edward, what you really think of him?"

"You must be prepared to see him looking ill," he answered, gently.

"I know I must; but tell me exactly how he is."

"He has been ill enough since I came to him, yet never so ill as he was before he allowed that anything was amiss. All who saw him at the meet at Elverly Gorse were shocked by his looks and the sound of his cough; and when I rode into York next morning, I was relieved to hear that he had given in, and sent for the doctor."

"He never mentioned his cough," said Isabel.

"Very likely not — nor his motive for such imprudence. Mrs. Evelyn Gascoigne and her party came over from Scarborough, to attend the military ball, and they were afterwards visiting Sir Richard Cassilis, on whose property the meet took place."

"Clara did not tell me that she had seen him."

"It is true, notwithstanding. I was also at the ball, and I had occasion more than once to contradict the report that your brother was the officer in the ——th to whom Miss Gascoigne is engaged. Do not imagine," Lord Edward added, after a pause, "that I speak from any personal interest in the matter. Whatever I may have thought of Miss Gascoigne, her heartless levity has dispersed the illusion as completely as if it had never existed."

The bitterness of his tone warned Isabel that he was not yet

qualified to be a dispassionate judge; and as she was not so charitably disposed towards Clara as to undertake her defence, it was easier to speak of any other subject.

"Will David be pleased to see me?"

"At first," said Lord Edward, frankly, "he was annoyed to hear of your coming, thinking that you could not be spared from home; but he was induced to accept it as a proof of your sister's convalescence."

"It was Ruth who persuaded me to come," said Isabel. "We felt that it was unfair to leave him any longer in your charge."

"It must be confessed," said Lord Edward, "that Lennox is an intractable patient. He is so variable, sometimes languid and depressed, and then, again, determined to resume duty, or go out hunting, or start for Holmdale. And you must be prepared to find him altered; his looks are the worst part of him."

This was not encouraging; and it was with a faint and fluttering heart that Isabel ascended the stair of her brother's lodging. Lord Edward would have parted from her at the door, if the maid had not informed him that there were other gentlemen upstairs. He looked annoyed, observing that the vicinity of Prospect-place to the barracks made David's room much too convenient a lounge for the officers. Accordingly they found the atmosphere of the small low room unsuited to an invalid. Three young men stood on the rug, fresh from the evening air, so that their loose and shaggy coats steamed before the fire, and the cigar in the mouth of one of them was possibly intended to correct the dampness of the air. David himself was reclining on a horse-hair sofa, a railway wrapper and one round bolster its only appliances of ease; and the comfortless aspect of the room was quite in keeping with this establishment. The chairs were set against the wall, piled with newspapers and great-coats, while the heavy centre table stood empty, ready to receive David's next meal.

Isabel took in this general impression of the room at one rapid glance, for the confusion which followed her entrance put a stop to further researches. The owner of the cigar was also

the proud possessor of a bull-terrier, which started up to justify his barrack-education, by resenting the intrusion of the wearer of shawl and bonnet. "Price" was instantly required to pacify his dog; and as he was desirous at the same time to dispose of his cigar, and to apologize to Miss Lennox, he only looked helpless and distracted. Isabel drew back with the air of shy statelessness which she involuntary wore before strangers, while Lord Edward pressed forward, and silenced the animal's fierce growl by an indignant word and gesture, which its owner seemed to take to himself.

"Here, Nipper, good Nipper, lie down, sir. We meant no offence, did we?"

"Nor did I take any," said Lord Edward; "I only wished to make way for Miss Lennox."

The young men took the hint, and after lingering for a moment to gaze curiously at the stranger, they left the room. Lord Edward only waited to follow them down-stairs until he had informed Isabel that he would return to walk back with her to Sheet-street, and the brother and sister were left together. But the welcome which Isabel had hoped was only reserved until they were alone, was still withheld. David did not raise himself from the sofa — he did not even raise his eyes — but continued to balance a letter-weight on his fingers; in which interesting occupation he had been engaged from the time of his sister's entrance.

"I hope you are better, David," said Isabel, timidly stooping to kiss his forehead, and remarking, as she did so, with a sudden pang, how distinctly the blue veins were traced upon his temples, as well as the expression of languor and weariness in which the lines of his face were settled.

"I wrote that I was better," said David, ungraciously.

"Yes; but Lord Edward was afraid that you would think yourself well too soon, and move before you are fit for it."

"Lord Edward might allow me to manage my own affairs."

"Oh, David! when he has been so kind in nursing you."

"So kind, that I wonder that you thought of interfering with his province. And, besides, you had to take care of Ruth; or

did you only make the worst of her illness for the sake of giving me something pleasant to think of?"

"Ruth wished me to come," said Isabel. She could not go on; but, as she still stood behind her brother, he did not see her struggling to drive back her tears, and he resumed with increasing irritation —

"And then the idea of bringing Miss Perrott was really preposterous. It is well you are in separate lodgings, for nothing will induce me to see her. The very sight of her wizened apple-face, and of the ill-assorted colours of her dress, would throw me into a fever."

"I am sorry that we came, since you do not like it," said Isabel; and her subdued and faltering tone touched David, already half ashamed of his petulance. He caught at one of Isabel's clustering curls, so as to draw down her face on a level with his own, and finding that it was wet with tears, he said, hastily —

"Foolish child! there is nothing to be sorry about. Only you have taken a useless journey, for I am determined to apply for sick-leave and go home at once. Tell me about Ruth."

Isabel began her story; but her brother listened with divided attention, and it presently appeared to whom his thoughts were straying.

"It was so like *her*," he said, in a quick, nervous voice, "to start off at once, as soon as she heard of Ruth's illness, giving up all the gaieties."

"You mean Clara," said Isabel, with constraint. "How did you hear it?"

"Not from you, you prudent sister; but I contrived to extract the truth from Lynmere, though he was equally disposed to reserve. He met her on the platform, where I had sent him to forage for some light literature, when she was on her way to Dyne Court. So you may finish the story. Have you seen much of her, and did you leave Ruth in her care?"

"Not exactly," said Isabel, smiling at the thought of her last injunctions to Sally. She did not choose to repeat them, how-

ever, only observing that Ruth was still too weak to bear a strange voice or face.

"Miss Gascoigne is no stranger," rejoined David; "but I see how it is. You have been as ungracious as possible, because you resent wrongs for which Miss Gascoigne is not answerable."

Isabel's heart swelled at the unjust reproach, for it was the sense of her brother's wrongs, rather than her own, which had estranged her from Clara; and though aware that it would be better to let the matter rest, she could not forbear replying —

"Oh, David, why should we talk of Clara? She is, and can be, nothing to you now."

"I do not know that," answered David, while the bright, fixed colour in his cheeks overspread face and brow. "If it had not been for this — this illness;" he remembered his sister's presence in time to suppress the epithet which rose to his lips — "she might have been mine. I believe she may be mine yet. But it is useless to speak to one from whom I can expect neither sympathy nor interest."

"Trust me, David," said Isabel; and, moved by her words, as well as by the tears which fell hot upon the hand she was caressing, her brother resumed —

"There, I did not mean to vex you; but if you were fretted and fevered with impatience as I am, you would know how hard it is for a man to keep his tongue in order. At first we met accidentally; at least I knew that it was possible Mrs. Evelyn Gascoigne might come from Scarborough for the officers' ball, but of course I was obliged to be there. I saw her the moment she came in, looking paler than usual, but quite as pretty. I kept aloof, dancing the whole evening with the Clarkes and Maudes, until we met by chance in the supper-room. She asked after you and Ruth, and said rather reproachfully that she thought I had cut her. And then you know I was obliged to ask her to dance."

"Well?" said Isabel; for her brother paused; perhaps in order to recall the mingled sensations with which he had yielded to such an obligation.

"Well, we have only met two or three times since, and her manner was just what it has ever been — bright and varying, and ever fascinating. When she spoke of Evelyn Gascoigne at all, it was as if she began to know how unworthy he is to be named in the same breath with her, going on as he does with Miss Thomason."

"Oh, David! I hope that *you* did not tell her that."

"Not I; I would not take the fellow's name between my teeth. But I forgot; you may not like to hear what I think of him."

"Thank you," replied Isabel, her full lip curving with no gentle emotion, "you need not spare him on my account; but I would rather hear of Clara."

"There is little more to tell. As I said just now, her manner was not always the same, and the impression which I made one day seemed to have vanished the next; so I could not bear to give in, when this cough came on, and that day at Elverly Gorse finished me. It was chilly, and dank, and miserable — a fine hunting-day, people said. How I shivered as I rode home, with a pain in my chest which would not let me go off a foot's pace; and though she was there, looking her best on horseback, as she always does, she was so surrounded by fine people that I could not get near her."

Although Isabel saw that her brother was in no mood to bear contradiction, she felt constrained to make some protest. "But, after all, David, she is still engaged to Captain Gascoigne."

"What then?" he rejoined, fiercely; "am I to consider myself under any obligation to that empty-headed coxcomb?"

"An empty-headed coxcomb! Oh, David, he is not that."

"I thought that you gave me leave to say what I pleased of that worthy," rejoined David, in a tone which silenced Isabel. He went on with nervous haste — "Besides, I expect Sir John himself to break off the engagement. He has had to pay Gascoigne's debts since he went back to Gibraltar, and he cannot have been very well pleased with their amount. And instead of coming home as soon as his affairs were settled, he has put off the sale of his commission on any idle excuse, for the sake, as

Miss Gascoigne herself says, of enjoying his liberty a little longer, and pursuing his flirtation with Miss Thomason."

That Clara should make such a speech was less surprising than that David should repeat it with complacency; and Isabel could only wonder in silence at his infatuation, since his hurried breathing, and low, frequent cough, warned her of the risk of agitating him by any opposition.

Lord Edward's entrance was a relief, since David was forced to turn to other subjects. And Isabel was gratified by his full inquiries after her sister, which enabled her to go over the details of her illness, still too fresh in her recollection to be set aside. Then tea came in; and though ashamed of leaving Miss Perrott so long alone, Isabel stayed to make it, and was rewarded by hearing that it was the first time David had found the tea drinkable since his illness.

"Well, what did you think of him?" said Lord Edward, as he and Isabel walked home together.

Isabel replied, in an unsteady voice, "I — I don't know; he does not think himself that there is anything really amiss."

They did not speak again, except to exchange a good-night on the door-step of the lodgings.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou

Shouldst lead me on.

I loved to choose and see my path; but now

Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will: remember not past years!

J. H. NEWMAN.

ISABEL had been more than a week in York before her brother succeeded in obtaining his doctor's sanction to return to Holmdale. Indeed it was only obtained by importunity, and the physician informed Lord Edward that, although it was useless to combat a sick man's fancy, he considered that if Mr. Lennox chose to move at all in such severe weather, he ought

to seek some milder climate. Lord Edward repeated this advice, and it was enforced by Isabel; but David laughed at them both, declaring that he had been coddled quite long enough, and that he should employ the remainder of his sick-leave in enjoying life at home. And when Isabel had written to prepare Ruth for their arrival on the following Monday, his spirits rose so much, that he pronounced himself equal to an interview with Miss Perrott, whom he had hitherto declined to see.

Poor Miss Perrott had some cause to think herself aggrieved by the arrangements of the foregoing week; and she was doubtful whether her offended dignity would permit her to accept the invitation so tardily made, to come and drink tea with David on the following evening.

"I hardly think I can go," she replied; "the nights are so cold, and the streets hardly safe for walking, this slippery weather."

"We did not think of your walking," said Isabel; "Lord Edward knows where to get a Bath chair, or else we can take a fly."

"That would be a very unnecessary expense, for I can drink my tea just as well alone. I am quite used to it, you know."

"But I am not used to it," said Isabel, pleadingly; "it makes me quite uncomfortable when I cannot get home in time. I really could not help it to-night, for Lord Edward took my letter to the post, and David made me wait till he came back, as he did not like me to walk home alone in the dark."

"Lord Edward is such a devoted cavalier," observed Miss Perrott, "running your errands, and escorting you hither and thither, that my attendance might have been dispensed with."

"He is very good-natured," said Isabel, not choosing to see more than the simple meaning of the words. "It was so kind of him to stay on, leading what must be a very tiresome life for a man; for I don't know what I should have done without him. He checks David's imprudence when I have quite failed, and never minds putting him out for the time; and they are as good friends as ever afterwards. Then it amuses me to see him

coolly turning all the officers out of the room as soon as he comes into it, and so politely, that it is impossible for them to take offence."

"I don't like the looks of those officers," observed Miss Perrott. "Some of them came out of the house as I left you at the door this morning, and they brushed by so quickly, very unlike Lord Edward's courtesy; and they dress in a different style."

"Yes," Isabel replied; "but you must remember the difference in age. These are David's contemporaries, and it is very possible that Lord Edward was a gay young man once, and as *soigné* in his dress as any of them, before he outgrew such youthful follies."

"Why, my dear," said Miss Perrott, "you talk as if Lord Edward was quite an elderly man. He cannot be much past thirty — not past five-and-thirty at the most."

"Very likely not," said Isabel, indifferently; "but one counts a man's age by his cares rather than his years, and Lord Edward has evidently known enough of life to sober him. No one thinks of calling Ruth young. Oh, Miss Perrott, how very glad I shall be to see Ruth again! It will make up for everything which is disagreeable in going home."

"What is disagreeable, my dear?" said Miss Perrott; but the question remained unanswered.

David murmured throughout the following day at the impending infliction of Miss Perrott's society; but when she actually appeared, he received her with a good grace, and was more like his old self than Isabel had yet seen him. The presence of a third person imposed some restraint on the petulance with which he was apt to resent any opposition to the caprice of the moment, and he was ashamed to exact the same service from his sister which she rendered with unwearied patience when they were alone. In such offices of love she only took delight, but there was great relief in feeling secure for a whole evening from any mention of Clara Gascoigne, which was ever allied with an accusation of indifference to all in which David's happiness was involved. He knew not, and never dreamed of

the prayer which went forth night after night from Isabel, bowed and prostrate, with quivering hands clasped over her face: — "Thy will be done! Teach him, Lord, in Thine own way, and at Thine own time, yet take him not hence till he has learned to seek Thee first." It was that sickening dread which robbed her of heart and hope. Others might forebode a different end to this illness; but he spoke only of recovery, and of that absorbing and unjustifiable passion which made life dear. If the sentence had indeed gone forth, was he prepared to meet it?

Only in prayer, however, could Isabel endure to put her fears into words, and she had not prepared Miss Perrott for the change she saw in David. Shocked by his appearance, she forgot the sharp things she had put aside to say to him on the first opportunity; and was in danger of annoying him in a different way, by expressing too great commiseration. It was his fancy, that evening, to throw off all invalid habits; he insisted that the two ladies should occupy the sofa, while he set about making the toast and preparing the tea, amid talk and laughter; and in this way he so much overtaken his strength, as to bring on a fit of coughing, which ended in an attack of breathlessness.

Miss Perrott was nervous and agitated, and though Isabel was too well-used to these attacks to be so easily alarmed, she was grateful for Lord Edward's entrance, who helped her brother back to the sofa, censured his imprudence, and warned him that if he did not take care, he would be unfit for his journey on the morrow.

"I submit to your tyranny to-night," replied David, as soon as he had recovered his voice, "because it is the last of your reign. To-morrow I shall do as I please."

"I am not so sure of that," said Lord Edward, composedly. "I am going your way; and I do not intend to resign my charge until you are fairly landed in Bean-street."

"Are you really going to Holmdale?" said Isabel, in a tone of genuine satisfaction, not echoed by her brother.

"To Dyne Court, of course," he said.

"To a more agreeable place," replied Lord Edward. "The Doctor has invited me to stay with him."

"The Doctor!" repeated Isabel; "he has never had any one to stay with him within my recollection."

"You must not be too particular about your fare," added David. "I suspect he lives on potatoes and buttermilk, and perhaps he may serve up a fried manuscript by way of a delicacy; and you must beware of displacing the contents of a chair when you are tired of standing, for the Doctor loves his books much better than his guests."

"Oh, David!" said Isabel; "there is no one more kind and hospitable than the Doctor."

"He means well," observed Miss Perrott, sententiously, "but he sadly wants humanizing; and latterly he has been more eccentric than ever."

"I do not care," said Isabel; "the Doctor is so good as he is, that I do not wish for any change."

"I quite agree with you," said Lord Edward, with equal warmth; "and I look forward to my visit with great pleasure."

"So do not I," said David; "it defeats my prospects of liberty. I meant to eat and drink, and talk, and go out as I pleased, with no one to preach prudence. You must have extracted an invitation from the Doctor on false pretences; do you profess to have discovered how to square a circle, or to decipher an unknown character?"

"I do not know what researches we are to pursue," said Lord Edward; "the Doctor has asked me to stay at the School-house, and it was too good an offer to be refused."

Isabel suspected that a letter to Dr. Berkeley, in which she had mentioned Lord Edward's influence over her brother, had prompted this invitation; but she only observed —

"So now you will see Ruth, Lord Edward; you do not know her at all."

"I have not seen her more than twice," he replied, "and I shall be very glad to improve my acquaintance. But I scarcely expected to hear that she was well enough to receive visitors."

"Not ordinary visitors," said Isabel, with the winning frankness which gave such a charm to her manner; "but she will be

very glad to see you. She writes that we are to find her in the sitting-room, ready to make tea as usual, though she has not cared to go down before, to see all Holmdale. I should not venture to believe her own account of herself if it were not confirmed by Mr. Ball."

"If she will only take common care," ejaculated Miss Perrott. "This illness was entirely brought on by over-exertion."

"I know," said Isabel, the quick tears starting to her eyes; "you need not remind me of that."

"It was no fault of yours," said David, with a defiant glance towards Miss Perrott; "no power on earth will prevent some persons from working themselves to death. Only take warning by her fate; you are becoming as lantern-jawed as Ruth herself."

"Never mind my looks," said Isabel, as she pillowed her oval cheek on David's hand, with a caressing gesture; "if you and Ruth will only make haste to be well, I shall grow rosy too."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Behind him was Reproch, Repentaunce, Shame:
 Reproch the first, Shame next, Repent behinde:
 Repentaunce feeble, sorrowfull, and lame;
 Reproch despihtfull, carelesse, and unkinde;
 Shame most ill-favoured, bestiall, and blinde:
 Shame lowrd, Repentaunce sighd, Reproch did scold;
 Reproch sharp stings, Repentaunce whips entwinde;
 Shame burning brond-yrons in her hand did hold:
 All three to each unlike, yet all made in one mould.

The Faerie Queene.

INSTEAD of awaiting the arrival of her brother and sister, Ruth left her room for the first time since her illness, early in the day.

"Sure, miss," said Sally, who, after assisting at her toilette, withdrew a few paces in order to see the effect. "Sure, miss

you had better keep on your white dressing-gown — the black makes you look whiter than ever."

"I must wear it, notwithstanding," said Ruth, "as I am to receive visitors. Dr. Berkeley is coming to see me to-day."

"You don't look so bad, either," said Sally, laying her broad hand on the soft, brown curls which clustered over Ruth's head — all that remained of her long hair. "It is these, I suppose, which reminds me of what you were as a young thing."

It was true, as Sally said, that Ruth had recovered a look of youth and freshness; it might be partly owing to the short curls, which, though peculiar, were not unbecoming, but the transparent delicacy of her complexion had returned, and her features had lost their harassed, careworn expression. It was not only the delusion of a lover which inclined Dr. Berkeley to think her beauty more remarkable than it had been in the days of her girlhood, when she rose to greet him with a smile and a blush. He scarcely touched her extended hand, and, after a hurried and nervous inquiry after her health, he seemed unable to proceed.

There was an awkward pause, and then Ruth spoke again, in a still, composed voice, which had the effect of restoring his self-possession.

"It is very good of you to come, and you can guess why I was anxious to see you. At least, I feel sure that I did write, though all which happened just before my illness seems like a confused dream."

"Yes, you wrote, and I called on the following day, to assure you that I would act on your letter; but you were too ill to see me."

"And so you did no more," said Ruth; and an expression of disappointment, which she tried in vain to conceal, crept over her face.

"If I thought you could bear the agitation," said the Doctor, hesitating.

Ruth looked up quickly. "I can bear anything but suspense. Was I right in my conjecture, and have you seen him, and done what you could to save him from immediate want?"

"I did what I could," said Dr. Berkeley; "but he is now beyond the reach of earthly care. The passing-bell this morning was for Richard Clinton."

"It was he, then," said Ruth, shivering; and her voice sank almost to a whisper as she added, "Did he know anything of Jasper?"

"He has heard nothing of him since he left Holmdale; but be satisfied, Ruth. On that day he saw him, and Jasper is now as clear in the sight of all men as he has ever been in your eyes."

A gasping sob — a half-uttered expression of thankfulness, broke from Ruth, and she waited breathlessly for further explanation.

"I did not think that you would be fit to hear of it to-day," said Dr. Berkeley, "and so I have not brought the declaration which was taken down from his lips, in my presence and that of Mr. Dunn. But I can tell you its purport. It seems that Richard Clinton, after remaining for some time concealed in the colony, worked his way to England in one of the Sydney vessels. He came here in utter destitution, not aware that Mrs. Clinton was gone; and, in hopes of obtaining relief from her, he hung about the obscure parts of the town, not daring to show himself openly, lest he should be recognised. When he heard of Mrs. Clinton's departure, he naturally applied to Jasper; and when he came to the Red House that morning, and asked to see you alone, it must have been after his first interview with his father."

"I understand," said Ruth, with white and quivering lips. "No wonder he looked wild and strange. Yet surely he did not — he could not, even at his father's word, have given up the money."

"He did not. You know he asked Dunn for the salary due to him without an idea that he should have to draw this money of Sir John's; but they were in his pocket-book together, since Clinton had urged upon him the necessity of receiving immediate relief, which might enable him to leave the town at once, so that Jasper did not like to lose time in going round by

Dunn's house. Clinton caught sight of the gold and notes when his son drew out his own 201, and instantly resolved to possess himself of it. He proposed that they should share alike, and take a passage to America, where they might make a fresh start in life. Desperate and unscrupulous, he had no hesitation in taking by force what Jasper indignantly refused to yield. He wrenched the packet from the boy's hand, who struggled fiercely to regain it, until reminded that the noise of the scuffle would attract attention, and that he would then be the cause of his father's capture. Jasper then turned from him without another word, and with a look of fixed despair, by which, the elder Clinton said, he had ever since been haunted."

"And there they parted?" said Ruth.

"Yes; in that very garret-room where you found the father. He went to America, but nothing prospered with him there; and he was pursued by the image of the son whose life he had blasted, though no other crime of his most unhappy life had awakened the pangs of remorse. He returned, not so much in the hope of ascertaining Jasper's fate, as from a strange desire to see once more the place of their meeting, and there to die."

"And he is dead," said Ruth, slowly.

"God is merciful," replied Dr. Berkeley, answering her thoughts rather than her words; "as soon as it appeared that I knew him, his confession was made, unsought by me, and the agony of his remorse was great. But truly such a death is fearful."

Ruth could not dwell on the thought, and she reverted to Jasper.

"If he could only know that he is clear."

Dr. Berkeley could not forbear to shrink a little from this proof that Jasper was still Ruth's first thought, and he answered with some constraint —

"I have done what I could, in putting advertisements in the papers, which may meet his eye. And when he learns that the truth is known, we may hope —" but the word choked him, and he changed the construction of the sentence — "it is not impossible he may return."

"I was not thinking of that," said Ruth, quickly; "indeed, I do not know that I wish it. It would be a relief to know that his spirit was no longer crushed by that terrible feeling of dishonour; but, after all, the disgrace is only transferred to his father, and he could never bear to meet the curious looks and officious sympathy of his old acquaintances here. By this time, I suppose, they all know the story?"

"Not through me; for I wished that you should hear it first. But I thought that Dunn ought to hear Jasper's justification; and though the declaration was only made yesterday, he lost no time in telling Sir John — and his wife. And to-day the story is circulating through the town."

"Well," said Ruth, philosophically, "at all events, the excitement will subside as soon, or sooner, than when they all called Jasper a misguided young man. It is strange — no, not strange, but true, how such an illness as I have had, reduces things to their true proportion."

"You did not need the lesson, Ruth."

"No one needed it more," she replied, earnestly; "I have been anxious and worried about so many things for others, as well as for myself, which do not really signify, or rather which all work for good. This last week has been a great rest, a sort of landing-place, from which to look back on the journey we have travelled. I don't think I shall feel either pain or pleasure as strongly as I did; life seems so short and so trifling."

"So all must feel who are brought near to death," said Dr. Berkeley; "but when we return to every-day duties the impression must fade. Perhaps it is better that it should."

"Perhaps," said Ruth; "and it is easier to put away carelessness for oneself than for others. I cannot help being anxious about David, and I am sure that Isabel is not satisfied, though she tries to write cheerfully."

"Lord Edward gives a better report of him; and he hopes that his improvement will be more steady when he gets home, for his feverish impatience has been much against him."

"His mind will work still more when he is here," said Ruth, with a sigh; "it is very unfortunate that the Gascoignes are

here. But Lord Edward may be able to keep him in order; it was very good of you to ask him."

"I was glad to be of use," said the Doctor.

"And now," added Ruth, "I ought to rest, that I may be fresh for the travellers. Thank you so much for all you have done, and especially for this visit; it has been like one of our sober, old-fashioned talks, and I hope you have enjoyed it as much as I have."

"Too much, Miss Lennox; I believe that I ought to forego the enjoyment until I have schooled myself to prize it less."

And the Doctor hurried away, leaving Ruth to lament that her hope of returning to their former easy friendship was still so far from its accomplishment.

Ruth was not reserving all her strength for the meeting with her brother and sister, for she thought it expedient to have her first visit from Clara before their return, and she expected her to call that afternoon. Accordingly, as it was growing dusk, the sweep of a carriage round the corner was followed by the familiar sound of the spirited horses' caracole, when checked in their course; and Clara presently entered the room, her cheeks glowing with pleasant excitement, as much perhaps as with the freshness of the outer air.

"How good of you to see me!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms round Ruth. "That Cerberus of yours has been so impracticable that I hardly ventured to ask for admittance; and she said 'Yes' as meekly as possible. How charming you look! only ill enough to be interesting, with those dear, quaint, little curls; I have half a mind to set up a fever too, in order to try the effect."

Ruth only smiled, and Clara rattled on —

"You try to look stern, but it will not do; you are not strong enough, and so you must be amiable for once in your life. I have so much to say that I hardly know where to begin. And first, tell me about Mr. Lennox."

"He is rather better; they are on their way home to-day, and I expect them in about an hour."

"By the five o'clock train? Then the best plan will be to send

the carriage to the station, and I can wait here till it comes back; it will be smoother and more comfortable for Mr. Lennox."

Ruth declined the offer; she said that she had ordered a fly, which would do well enough, and she did not wish to keep Clara out so late.

"You think me a dangerous person," said Clara, with an arch smile.

"I have reason to think so," Ruth answered, gravely.

"Not now, Ruth, indeed. I confess that I did flirt a little, the very least in the world, with Mr. Lennox at the York gaieties, but he might have known that it was only because I was piqued with Evelyn. That is all right now; I have had the most charming letter, begging me to make papa more reasonable, for he has been quite disagreeable about his debts, as if young men were not always extravagant. He says that it is all nonsense about Miss Thomason, and he has sold out, and is to be in England this very night. He will come down here at once, and he wants me to fix the wedding-day. Now that I am sure he cares for me, I don't mean to flirt with any one, so you see Mr. Lennox is quite safe."

"For the future," said Ruth; "but you seem to forget that the past cannot be undone. However, there is no use talking about it, only I wish you to keep away from the house while he is here."

"I shall not want you so much when I have Evelyn," replied Clara; "but I must see you now and then; and surely Mr. Lennox is able to take care of himself, now that he has fair warning that I mean to flirt no more. Now don't look so grave, Ruth; he will soon recover his disappointment. The Forlorn Hope is quite cured, and his complaint was of much longer standing."

"If you will talk so lightly, Clara, I would rather talk of something else."

"So we will. I have to comment on your own affairs, but Evelyn's news put everything else out of my head; I wish you joy of your hero. Mr. Dunn says that the whole town is ringing with his praises, and even his prosaic mind was excited by this

délabrement. The best part of the story is Mr. Clinton's coming home to die so conveniently, for one would not feel easy as long as there was the contingency of such a *beau père* turning up at any moment."

The mischievous remark did not call even a passing blush to Ruth's cheek. She only said, though with little hope of checking Clara's levity —

"If you had seen his face of remorse and misery, you could not talk thus of his death."

"So you really saw him," said Clara, with eager interest. "Mr. Dunn said something about it, but I could not understand the story."

"I found him in a cottage in my district," said Ruth, "and guessed who he was. But I would rather not talk about it, for it is like a dream which haunted me all the while I was ill. Don't you think you had better go home before it gets colder?"

"And you want to get rid of me before the arrival," said Clara, rising. "Well, I will go; and to please you I mean to ignore Mr. Lennox's existence, and to make myself as disagreeable as possible when we meet. But I suppose I may send you some grapes as usual, and if you like to share them with him there is no harm done; how long is he to stay?"

"I do not know; I am afraid that he is very far from being fit for duty."

"He will soon be well," said Clara, confidently; "perhaps Evelyn's appearance may act as a tonic. Good-bye, *ma mie*; if you had not driven me away, I meant to have helped you to compose an advertisement to 'Jasper,' for the second column of the *Times*. Your initials or mine would have a better effect than the Doctor's."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I only know I loved you once;
I only know I loved in vain:
Our hands have met, but not our hearts;
Our hands will never meet again.

Hood.

"HAVE you seen Miss Gascoigne, Ruth?" said David. He only waited to ask the question until Lord Edward had gone to the School-house, while Isabel went up-stairs to take off her bonnet.

"Yes; she was here this afternoon," answered Ruth, pausing for a moment before she felt sufficiently hard-hearted to dash the hopes expressed by David's eager, listening attitude, as he raised himself from the sofa on which he so wearily reclined. "She was in great spirits, for she heard from Captain Gascoigne that he will most likely be at Dyne Court to-morrow."

"He will, will he?" — and the words escaped from David as if much of no pleasant import remained unsaid. He sank back on his pillows, and scarcely spoke again for the rest of the evening. He complained of headache, and would eat no tea; but an impartial observer might have said that he was suffering as much from ill-humour as from ill-health. He evinced no interest in the conversation between the sisters, and even the account of Jasper's exculpation, and of Ruth's interview with the father, passed without comment.

As they went up to bed, Isabel asked eagerly, "Well, what do you think of him?" and Ruth could only answer with a sigh, that she hoped he might be better on the morrow.

David said that he *was* better next morning. Ruth had consented to breakfast in her own room, and Isabel tried to persuade her brother to do the same; but he insisted on coming down-stairs. He declared that he felt fresh and well, only ravenously hungry; but, after making Isabel hasten breakfast, he found fault with everything. And when Isabel bestirred

himself to find something he could eat, he impatiently pushed aside his plate.

"There, that will do. I have had quite enough, and I shall go out in search of an appetite for dinner. It is a pity to lose the fine part of the day."

"It does not look fine now," said Isabel, glancing at the scrap of leaden sky visible between two blocks of chimneys. "If we wait for an hour the sun may come out, and then we can take a turn below our own old south wall. I have a key of the garden-gate, so that we need not encounter the Dunns."

"I shall do no such thing," said David. "I am quite tired of playing the invalid, and I shall go out for a ride. A good scamper over the country will freshen me, especially after sitting in this close room. You have made up such a fire that it is quite intolerable." He had complained of feeling chilly a moment before.

"But you have no horse, David."

"I can hire one, however. There is a very respectable hack at the Blue Boar, which will carry me as far as I need to go."

Isabel knew now where he was going, and she knew also that remonstrance would be in vain; yet she made one more effort.

"Lord Edward will be here soon," she said, timidly, "and he will be able to tell us what sort of a day it is."

"Very likely; he will tell us that the wind is from the east, that there has been frost, and that there will be rain. I don't care for past, present, or future, for I am weary of all this coddling."

"At least, wait till Ruth comes down."

"There is no use waiting. I shall see her when I come home." And David snatched up his hat and gloves, impatiently rejected the additional neckerchief which his sister proffered, and departed. Isabel looked after him, as well as her tears would permit, and pondered with a swelling heart on the change which the last few weeks had wrought. There was scarcely a trace remaining of his gay, courteous manner, softened into especial tenderness in his intercourse with his favourite sister.

If any one but Lord Edward had surprised her in this fit of crying, she would have been a good deal discomposed; but she was so entirely at her ease with him, that it was a relief rather than an effort to confide to him the cause of her unhappiness, not even withholding her suspicions that he had gone to Dyne Court.

"He looked so feverish and ill," she said; "and if he gets wet, it must bring on his cough."

"I do not think it will rain," said Lord Edward. He could think of nothing more consoling to say; but there are times when we do not desire consolation, and this was Isabel's present mood.

"I meant," she said, "to be quite content when I got him safe home, especially as Ruth is so much better; yet everything seems more cheerless than ever."

"Be still, sad heart, and cease repining," said Lord Edward, with a grave smile.

There was no need to finish the quotation.

"I know," said Isabel, quickly, "I am very ungrateful." And she walked to the window to hide the gathering tears.

Lord Edward presently followed her.

"If you can tell me where to find a horse, Miss Lennox, I can ride after your brother and easily overtake him before he reaches Dyne Court. Then I may at least persuade him to return in good time."

"Thank you," said Isabel, colouring; "it would be only painful to you."

"Not in the least," said Lord Edward, decidedly. He never omitted the opportunity of bringing forward his entire indifference to Clara. "But I am afraid that I have tutored Lennox until he is beginning to run restive."

"Yes; I believe it would do no good," said Isabel, remembering the irritation with which David had so lately spoken of Lord Edward's interference. "Perhaps he may find out for himself how unfit he is for riding, and turn back."

Lord Edward acquiesced; and since he could help Isabel in no other way, it seemed to him that he could not do better

than pass the morning with her, in hopes of beguiling her thoughts.

In the meanwhile David took the nearest road to Dyne Court, mounted on the "respectable hack" furnished by the Blue Boar. Isabel had not spoken too hardly of the day; a chilling thaw had succeeded to the frost and snow of the preceding week, the roads were sodden, and the air damp and raw. David shivered, and wished for the rejected neckerchief; and after urging his unwilling beast to a trot, he was unable to keep it up, on account of failure of breath, and renewed pain in his side. Before he reached Dyne Court the excitement of fever had given place to a languid depression, both of mind and body. He rode into the stables by the back entrance, and left his horse there, after ascertaining that Miss Gascoigne was at home. He had just reached the colonnade when his progress was arrested by the sound of Clara's voice, and he passed on from behind the column which intercepted his view of her companion. Clara was hanging on the arm of Evelyn Gascoigne, her upturned face glowing with a bright and speaking happiness, very different from the careless coquetry which he had vainly construed into an expression of equal or deeper feeling.

David saw and acknowledged the difference, and at that moment the hope which he had so wilfully cherished, died within him, with a pang of such acute suffering as those only may comprehend who have experienced the same. His first impulse was to turn and fly, his next to advance with an unflinching step; and this he did, but with a countenance so wild and haggard that Clara drew back in alarm, while Evelyn exclaimed —

"Good heavens, Lennox! is that you? You are the last person I expected to see."

"I might say the same," rejoined David.

"So I can believe," said Evelyn, with a meaning smile, which animated David with sufficient strength to have felled his rival to the ground, powerless as he had felt a moment before.

Clara saw the fierce light gleaming in his eyes, and inter-

posed with the playful decision which was, even now, irresistible.

"Now confess, Mr. Lennox, that you had not Ruth's sanction to come so far the day after your journey? You must go home at once."

"I will go, since you desire it, Miss Gascoigne. I came to see you, not aware that you were otherwise engaged."

"There is such a thing as wilful ignorance," Evelyn began, with some haughtiness; but as David's eyes again flashed fire, he changed his tone. He was successful, and success can afford to be magnanimous. "You had better come into the house and rest, and Clara will order the carriage to take you home; you look miserably ill, and quite unfit to ride."

"Do come in, Mr. Lennox," said Clara, in a pleading tone, which seemed to sting him to madness. He turned upon her one glance of reproachful bitterness, and strode away.

"I will follow him, to see that he does not get into mischief," said Evelyn, after a moment's pause.

"No; do not," said Clara, clinging to him; "you will only quarrel."

"Foolish child!" said Evelyn; "do you think I cannot take care of myself?" He attempted to shake her off, but she only clung the closer; and, flattered by her anxiety, he suffered David to go his own way, and they continued to pace the colonnade.

"So he is another of your victims," he resumed, in a tone between jest and earnest; "certainly it was high time for me to come home."

"If you had not stayed away so long," rejoined Clara, "I should have had nothing to do with him; and he might have known me well enough to see that I never cared for him in the least."

"Then I am to understand that you gave him no encouragement for this fresh *accès* of love?"

Clara felt that her ground was not very defensible, so she attempted to carry the attack into the enemy's country.

"I don't suppose that I flirted with him half so much as you did with Laura Thomason."

"Possibly not," said Evelyn, coolly; "but I may do many things which are not expedient for you. If you choose to be the talk of the county as a notorious and heartless coquette, well and good; only, it must not be as my affianced bride. So you may take your choice."

"Oh, Evelyn!"

"I am thoroughly in earnest. We have had enough of this intimacy with the Lennoxes; and, at all events, while David is at home I will not have you always running into Holmdale to see the young ladies, or on any pretext whatever. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Clara answered, low and submissively.

Truly that untamed spirit, so impatient of the lightest check, had at last found its master.

CHAPTERS XXXVII.

*La vita fugge, e non s'arresta un'ora:
E la morte vien dietro a gran giornate:
E le cose presenti, e le passate
Mi danno guerra, e le future ancora.*

PETRARCA.

ONE bright and balmy day in March, when the first breath of spring was laden with sweet fragrance, calling forth the song of the winter-thrush, and swelling the buds of the horse-chestnut, Ruth walked out of the town into one of the country roads; and, as sometimes before, she had not gone far before she was overtaken by the Dyne Court barouche. Nothing, however, roused her from her abstraction until she was startled by Clara herself, who instantly alighted, and seized her hand in both of hers, as she exclaimed —

"At last! I have longed so much to see you, and I began to despair."

"It was good of you not to come," said Ruth.

"Nothing that you said kept me away, only — however, I will tell you about it presently. Where are you going?"

"To the hazel copse to look for primroses."

"I will go with you. Please let me go," Clara added, pleadingly; "you will not tell Mr. Lennox, and no one else will know."

They had reached the footpath leading to the copse in question, and she scarcely waited for Ruth's permission before she led the way over the stile, directing the carriage to drive on and wait for her at the turnpike.

"And now," she said, twining her arm round Ruth, "tell me about your brother. I hardly dare ask at home, for both papa and Evelyn look reproachful, and answer as if it was my fault. I believe they make the worst of it on purpose to vex me; or is he really so ill?"

"He is very weak," said Ruth; "he has never been out of his room, hardly out of bed, since that ride to Dyne Court six weeks ago."

"You, too, Ruth! it is not fair to cast up that ride against me, as if I had asked him to come."

"I did not mean to blame you, Clara; you best know what encouragement you gave him; but at any rate that is at an end now, and though you disclaimed my thanks just now, I must repeat how glad I am that you have kept aloof since that interview."

"You must thank Evelyn," said Clara; "it is his doing."

There was a touch of irony in her tone, and Ruth answered gravely —

"I think he is quite right."

"Oh, perfectly right; only you know that I am not used to be chidden and tutored like a naughty child, and I don't quite like it. Though I should not mind," she added, while tears, which rarely dimmed the brightness of her beauty, started to her eyes, "if I believed that he loved me; but he does not care enough about me to be jealous; he only thinks of the eyes of the world, and wishes me to act accordingly."

"Which you have forgotten now, or you would not talk so recklessly," said Ruth.

"It is only to you, Ruth; and even Evelyn, little as he under-

stands you, would not take your eyes for those of the world; besides, I must have my talk out now, for it is my last opportunity. You know we are to be married upon Lady-day; and then I shall 'love, honour, and obey,' as in duty bound."

"Duty is a law you have never yet obeyed, Clara," said Ruth, but very gently. She was grieved by the excitement of Clara's manner, which told how forced her spirits were.

They entered the copse as she spoke; but Clara would not allow her to begin her search for primroses, and made her sit down beside her on a fallen tree. She made no direct reply to this last observation, but continued to confide her griefs.

"It has been such a wearisome time, especially since Aunt Eliza and the young ladies came. They always regarded me with virtuous horror; and Aunt Eliza does not like me any better for being her destined daughter-in-law, thinking, I imagine, that I corrupted Evelyn's morals. And I have had a hard time with papa, who has changed his mind about the marriage, and almost wanted to break it off when he learned what his debts were; if the said debts were not rather pressing, I believe that Evelyn himself would have no objection. Then there has been so much to arrange; questions about the rooms, the wedding-breakfast, and the *trousseau*; and I have been so worried at having to decide everything for myself, for there was no use asking papa, when he was put out already, and Evelyn takes no interest in the matter. Oh, Ruth! I sometimes think that, if mamma were alive, it would all be very different." And the cheek which Clara pressed against Ruth's was wet with tears.

Ruth had never before seen her in such a mood; and before she had determined how to treat it, Clara became impatient of her silence.

"Talk to me, Ruth; I want to be scolded, and petted into good-humour again."

"If you really want advice —," said Ruth, slowly.

"I *do* really want advice, though I don't engage to follow it."

"Well, then, I think it would be better to follow Sir John's wishes."

"And give up Evelyn!" said Clara, vehemently. "Oh no!

it is too late now. Even papa would not like it, now that the wedding-day is fixed; and, besides, I love him too well."

"And yet you believe that he does not care for you."

"Not as I do for him, but still we shall get on very well. We understand each other, and I shall not expect too much; and there is no one half so pleasant, you must allow that, Ruth."

"I do not know him well," said Ruth, too much relieved to escape the responsibility which Clara had seemed disposed to thrust upon her, to wonder at the versatility of her humour.

"Well, you shall know him some day, when Mr. Lennox is well, and all these disagreeables forgotten. And, by the way, tell me about Isabel. Evelyn said that they met accidentally the other day; that he at all events need have nothing on his conscience, since she looked more beautiful than ever — am I not magnanimous to repeat the compliment? — and perfectly cool and unconcerned."

Ruth had heard nothing of this meeting, and she could not think that Isabel's silence respecting it arose from the indifference ascribed to her. She felt indignant, and it cost her an effort to answer calmly.

"Perhaps it was well for Isabel that her troubles did not come alone, and that she is too much absorbed in David's illness to think of herself. She is very good and reasonable, however, in taking regular exercise, and I should like to gather my primroses, and get back before it is too late for her to go out."

"Not just yet," said Clara, detaining her. "I have one or two more things to ask. What has been the result of the Doctor's advertisement? I don't know if there has been time to hear from California."

"I told you," said Ruth, "that I did not expect Jasper to answer the advertisement, even though he may be much nearer than California."

"Then, perhaps, you have left off caring about it. For you look stronger than you used to do, and prettier, though you have put away those bewitching little curls. I am quite sorry that your hair has begun to grow already."

"Really, Clara," said Ruth, impatiently, "if you have nothing more important to say, you may let me go."

"Indeed, I have something very important to say. Is it true that Lord Edward was here for three weeks, that he is coming back again, and that he is a Forlorn Hope no longer?"

"The Doctor asked him to spend the Easter vacation with him. I am not certain whether he is coming or no."

"That is a meagre answer, Ruth; and you blushed — you positively did. You cannot pretend that the Doctor is his only attraction. I congratulate you, and I am sorry that I did not make him over to you long ago, as I had some thoughts of doing. I always thought that you would suit each other, though the combination may be too serious for the rest of the world. And Lady Edward is such a pretty title."

Ruth looked annoyed, and answered shortly, "How can you talk so absurdly? — there never was anything more unfounded."

"Then you are constant to the gold-digger? It is too hard that Lord Edward should be disappointed again."

"There is no disappointment in the case. Lord Edward thinks as little of me as I do of him."

"Then, does he think of any one else? — Surely, it cannot be Isabel! Ah, I see by your face that I have guessed right."

"And so you may go home to spread the idle report," said Ruth, as she arose from her seat; "and you can leave me to gather primroses alone."

"No, Ruth," said Clara, hanging round her; "we must not part so. I will go if you like, but not till you have promised to remember me sometimes."

"I am not likely to forget," said Ruth.

"You mean to remember in how many ways I have teased and thwarted you."

"No, I do not, Clara — at least I shall think how we have contrived to love each other through it all."

"That is so like you, Ruth, and so dear. And only one thing more. It is not my fault if the Holmdale bells ring a peal on Lady-day. I wanted to say that we did not wish it; but he said

that would be particular and absurd. And so I tell you, that you may not think me more unfeeling than I really am. Good-bye, dear, dearest Ruth!"

"Good-bye," said Ruth, gently unclasping the entwining arms which locked her in Clara's fast embrace. As Clara slowly turned away, she watched the slight, girlish figure with sad forebodings, and thought how, in the attainment of her cherished hope, its bright promise had crumbled into ashes. She knew Clara well enough to fear that she would only seek to still the cravings of an aching and disappointed heart with the husks which do not satisfy, and all which remained true and lovable in her nature must soon be frittered away.

But Ruth remembered that she had come to gather prim-roses, and not to moralize, and she set about the search in earnest. She was tolerably successful; and she considered herself well rewarded by the brightening smile with which David took the bunch from her hand, and said that it was fresh and sweet.

"He looks better this afternoon," said Isabel, who was working at the foot of the couch; and the tone in which *he* was spoken, justified Ruth's assertion that all her sister's earthly hopes and fears were centered in that sick room.

A return of inflammation of the lungs had been the consequence of David's imprudent ride to Dyne Court; and though the more alarming symptoms had passed away, great prostration of strength remained, together with so much languor and depression, that it seemed as if the mind and body reacted on each other, and he wanted energy to be well. His doctor urged him to leave Holmdale, and seek some warmer climate, as soon as he was fit to travel; but that time had not arrived. He could not be induced to leave his room, or to see any one but his sisters; and though listening to their conversation with a languid interest, he seldom exerted himself to join in it. Mr. Ball directed that he should be roused as much as possible; and the sisters learned to talk over the small events of the day with an assumed animation which it was often difficult enough to sustain. This afternoon, however, Ruth could not impart to him the in-

cident of her walk, and the pauses between disjointed remarks on the early spring, the westerly wind, and the new paving of Bean-street, became longer and longer, until silence reigned altogether.

Isabel spoke again to say that she must go out, and as a matter of duty the exertion was made. She put on her bonnet and cloak with all speed, and timed herself so as to be back within the hour prescribed as necessary for air and exercise. Every minute passed out of David's room seemed to her so much waste of life.

When there was no third person to mark the effect of her words, Ruth acted on her impulse to tell of her walk with Clara, feeling that if it was expedient to rouse him from his languor, nothing was likely to do so more effectually. Accordingly she began, in a voice as calm and steady as if it was a matter of unconcern to both —

"The Gascoigne marriage is fixed for Lady-day."

"Who told you?" said David, shading his eyes with his hand, as if the light was too strong for him. So at least Ruth chose to interpret the gesture, and she rose and drew down the blind.

"Clara herself. I saw her to-day for the first time."

"And how was she looking?"

"Not so bright as usual; and there is something touching, poor child, in the way she seems to feel the want of a mother at this time. I never heard her allude to it before. She asked after you."

"She did?" There was a nervous action of the hands which David had clasped across his temples; and then he added, querulously, "There was no use telling me the day, Ruth. I would rather not have known it."

"Then I am sorry I told you," she replied; "but I thought you might find it easier to bear things which you know to be inevitable."

"That is so like one of your refinements — as if I had the option of bearing them or not."

"About the way of bearing them, then, David."

"It is all the same thing." He was silent for some moments, and then resumed — "I wonder if I shall be well enough to leave this place before the 25th."

This was the first time that David had contemplated the possibility of moving, and Ruth thought it a good sign.

"Perhaps you may," she said, "if you gather strength as fast as I did when I began to mend."

"You may well say *if*. For now it seems that I lose, rather than gain ground. What does Ball tell you? More, I imagine, than that I am getting on as well as I can expect."

Ruth was again pleased with the awakening energy which prompted the question, and she thought it best to give the doctor's opinion without reserve.

"He is not satisfied," she said; "he feels that you have made no decided rally from your illness."

"He thinks me in a bad way," said David, with a short laugh. "Well, I have not found life so pleasant that I care greatly about prolonging it, and I shall not be much missed."

"You would not say so, if you thought of Isabel, David." Ruth would not speak, and, indeed, she scarcely thought, of herself.

"Isabel *will* care. I understand her wistful looks now, poor child. And how long does he give me?"

"Oh, David, how can you speak so lightly? I have longed so much in all this illness to see your thoughts turned towards Him 'Who bringeth down to the grave, and raiseth up.'"

"It is easy for you, Ruth," David answered, hastily; "for you have thought of nothing else. But when a man's life has been taken up with such a vision as mine, and then with the ruin and disappointment which followed, he will be haunted by such cares to the end. You can bear witness that I was more moved to hear of Clara's wedding-day than that I was dying."

"Because," said Ruth, "you do not certainly know that you *are* dying, no more do I. I told you honestly of our anxiety; not that you might make light of it, but to prepare you for what may be, and to rouse you to use all means of

recovery. Mr. Ball has said repeatedly that the symptom he likes least, is your listlessness and indifference about yourself."

"I am indifferent," said David, briefly.

"Not really; you will not find it so when death is near. The most holy and the most unhappy shrink alike from anticipating that hour."

"Not if they have nothing left to live for."

"We all live that we may learn to die," replied Ruth.

David looked up quickly.

"You think me then so bad, Ruth?"

"I only mean that we can none of us feel that we are ready, until God calls us. And, dear David, you will not say again that you have nothing to live for when you think that you are all which is left to us — to poor Isabel, whose spirits are already so broken."

"I am a useless and unsatisfactory possession," said David; but the words were not spoken in the same sullen tone as before. Ruth thought it best not to prolong the conversation. She gave him one long and tender kiss, and left the room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

What does not man grieve down? From the highest
As from the vilest thing of every day,
He learns to wean himself; for the strong hours
Conquer him.

COLERIDGE'S *Wallenstein*.

THAT conversation bore fruits. With all his professed weariness of life, David was startled to think that death might be near, as well as by Ruth's warning, spoken with such loving courage, that he was not prepared to meet it. And as no one, checked in the full tide of youth and vigour, requires to be convinced by many arguments that life is a gift worth retaining, his professed indifference passed away, and Isabel herself did not mark his progress towards recovery with greater anxiety. And progress was made; very gradual, and in some measure retarded by this very anxiety, since he was unduly depressed

by an occasional return of fever or failure of appetite; still he regained strength, Mr. Ball ceased to speak despondingly, and hope lighted up Isabel's eyes once more. The change in David's manner was cause enough for satisfaction; instead of passively submitting to his sisters' unwearied attendance, he seemed really to enjoy having them with him, and he treated Isabel with something of his former playful tenderness. Ruth was not content only, but thankful, to take the second place, and to feel that her companionship was only needed when Isabel was not at hand; for she knew that such intercourse as they now enjoyed was best both for her brother and sister, and she could rejoice in their joy.

So the days went on to Lady-day, and David, though still too weak to leave the house, had made the important step of coming down-stairs. He had not made his appearance, however, when the church-bells rang out a merry peal; and as the clang fell on Isabel's ear, she felt so much on his account that she never for a moment thought of herself. She looked up anxiously when he entered; he was pale from the exertion of dressing, but otherwise much as usual, and going towards him, she slipped her hand within his.

"So that is the wedding-peal," David said, walking to the window with the slow, cautious step which betrays weakness. "Will they come through Holmdale?"

"I don't know where they are going," rejoined Isabel.

David looked up to the blue sky. "She was so sure to have a bright day."

"It is too bright to last."

"That sounds ominous, Isabel."

"I did not mean it," she answered, hastily.

"And, after all, you have as much right to rue the day as I. Shall we be magnanimous, and wish them joy?"

"Them, and myself too, if you please," said Isabel, with the proud flashing glance ever called forth by any allusion to Evelyn Gascoigne.

"I am not so strong-minded," said David, with something between a smile and a sigh; "though, perhaps, in time I may

be able to see that things are better as they are. We must return to the old days, when we dreamed of being all in all to each other."

"Those were happy days, David."

"Then you are satisfied to spend your life with a cross-grained bachelor-brother?"

"More than satisfied," Isabel answered, clinging closer to his side. She little dreamed how soon her professions were to be put to the test.

At this moment Lord Edward quite unexpectedly walked in.

"Have you come down express from London to attend the wedding?" David asked. He was in a mood when it was easier to make jesting allusions to the subject than to be altogether silent.

"Happily, I was not invited," said Lord Edward.

"Then you would have thought it necessary to go, to prove your equanimity?"

"Or my indifference," said Lord Edward carelessly. "I was only glad to escape, because a wedding is always a tiresome affair."

"But you have not told us what brought you here," said Isabel.

"Cannot you take it for granted that I have come to see you and Lennox? He looks much better than I expected, and does more credit to your nursing than he did to mine."

"Does he not look well?" said Isabel, complacently; "and he is such an excellent patient."

"Because Isabel is such an amiable nurse," said David; "not near so aggravating as you were."

"But you have not yet told us," persisted Isabel, "what brings you here so soon. Has the House adjourned already?"

"No; but the bill in which I was interested has passed through committee, and I was tired of London. The Doctor told me that I might come back whenever I pleased, and I have taken him at his word. Where is Miss Lennox?"

"Not at the wedding," said David. "You looked almost afraid to ask. I suppose she is up-stairs, busy about some household matters."

"Then I shall wait till she comes down. The Doctor will be in school, so there is no use going on there at present."

"No, he will not," said Isabel, quickly. "Sir John asked for a holiday."

"Sit down, however," said David, "and tell me the news. I want to be amused." And Lord Edward waited for no second invitation.

"I want to hear your news first," he said. "Is it true that you are going abroad?"

"Yes; at least, if I get the additional sickleave for which I have applied. We are to break up our establishment here, and all go together, to Germany and Switzerland."

"Will it not be pleasant?" said Isabel. "We had some difficulty in persuading Ruth to agree to the plan, for she wanted me to go and take care of David; but we would not hear of her being left behind; and when once she is uprooted, I dare say she will enjoy it. Oh! I hope it is not wrong to be as glad as I am to leave Holmdale."

"I don't wonder you are glad," said Lord Edward; but he did not appear to share her satisfaction. "How long are you to be away?" he added.

"Nothing is settled," said David; "but if my regiment is, as I hear, to be moved to Malta, I want my sisters to go on with me to winter there. Since they have no ties to England, they may as well see a little of the world."

"Are you looking forward to next winter already?"

"Why, my dear Lynmere," said David, laughing, "you forget what it is to have the cares of a family — you who live in chambers and keep a servant who does not even allow you to decide what waistcoat you will wear. Since I have been well enough to think of moving, we have talked of nothing but the household arrangements, which make it necessary to determine how long my sisters are likely to be away."

"As you say," rejoined Lord Edward, "I cannot enter into these details. I suppose, Miss Lennox, that you have been too much occupied by them to take any interest in politics."

"No, indeed," said Isabel. "I made a point of reading all the debates in which your name appeared. Did I not, David?"

"So sedulously," answered her brother, "that I was a little afraid of her becoming a female politician."

"There is no danger," said Lord Edward; "she is not the stuff of which they are made. I hope, Miss Lennox, that we coincide in opinion."

"Not always," said Isabel; "however, I liked to read your views, for there is an air of reality about the speech of a person one knows."

Ruth came in, and Lord Edward stayed talking until dinner was announced; and his ready assent to David's invitation to partake of it did not evince his usual consideration for the Doctor, who was prepared to receive his guest by the arrival of his portmanteau, and sat waiting for him at home. They were in the act of crossing the passage into the little dining-room, when Sally opened the house-door, and a voice, familiar enough to all but Ruth, inquired for Mr. Lennox.

"Oh, Raeburn, is that you?" said David. "Won't you come in?"

"May I?" he replied, walking into the passage without waiting for a reply.

"Ruth, Lord Raeburn," continued David. "You know Isabel, I think." And Lord Raeburn turned towards her with a smile of delighted recognition. Isabel shook hands composedly, while her thoughts travelled back to the time and place where she had last seen him — in the colonnade at Dyne Court.

"We were just going in to our early dinner," said Ruth; "will you have any luncheon?"

"I shall be very happy; a wedding is always a hungry affair, and I shirked the breakfast on the plea of important business, which was nothing else than to call and ask after you, Lennox."

"I am much honoured," said David. "So you have come from the wedding; how did it go off?"

"Oh, very well," said Lord Raeburn, drawing in a chair; and to Isabel's great indignation selecting the best slice of the

boiled chicken, which was to be David's dinner. "It was rather heavy, as a wedding is apt to be, except to the principals; and *they* did not appear to enjoy it particularly. Gascoigne looked as much bored as was consistent with good breeding, much more so than was consistent with his good luck. Clara was nervous, though I thought she had brass enough for anything."

"Did she — was she looking well?" said David.

"Very pretty, of course; she could not well look otherwise, and she is generally so much overdressed that the simple white was more than usually becoming; but I do not care for that style of beauty." And he glanced significantly towards Isabel, who haughtily turned her head aside to speak to Lord Edward.

With rather perverse self-torture, David demanded further particulars of the wedding; and when it appeared that Lord Raeburn had little more to tell, he subsided into silence, and left to others the task of entertaining his visitor. Lord Raeburn was disposed to devote himself to Isabel, but he was baffled by her brief and distant replies; and he presently took leave, deciding that all her beauty did not atone for the haughty disdain which made it impossible to get up even a passing flirtation.

"Such a conceited assuming fellow," said Lord Edward, before the door was fairly closed. "I never saw anything so cool as the way he invited himself to luncheon; I heard your servant tell him that you were just going in to dinner."

"Why, really, Lynmere," said David, amused by his unwonted vehemence, "I may remark, without meaning anything uncivil, you and Raeburn stand on much the same footing, as far as luncheon is concerned."

"Oh no, David," said Isabel; "Lord Edward is quite different."

"Thank you," he said, turning quickly round; "would you mind explaining the distinction?"

"It is not fair to ask for a compliment," said Isabel, colouring; "you know that I don't like Lord Raeburn."

"From which we are to infer whom you *do* like," said David. "Lynmere ought to cry 'hear, hear!' and certainly that infor-

mation was gratuitous, for, if we did not know it before, your manner made it sufficiently evident that he is no favourite. You were very ungracious."

As soon as dinner was over, Ruth went to put on her bonnet, for she had resumed her work in the Netherton, though on a more moderate scale. Lord Edward asked permission to accompany her there on his way to the School-house; and though it was exactly out of the way, Ruth made no objection, and they set out together.

"I wanted to explain," he said, with startling abruptness, before they had gone many paces, "what has brought me again so soon. Your sister —"

"Yes," said Ruth, with a smile.

"And you wish me success?"

"I do."

"Thank you." And the eagerness with which Lord Edward clasped her hand expressed even more than his words.

"But," continued Ruth, "I am sure that you will only distress and startle Isabel if you speak to her now."

"You mean that she does not care for me," Lord Edward said, with a look of deep mortification.

"I think — I know that she likes you as a friend; indeed, she told you so herself five minutes ago. But if there is any deeper feeling, she herself is not conscious of it."

"That is true. I felt myself that she could not have spoken with such perfect ease, if she had given me the love for which I crave. But when she hears my sentiments —"

Ruth shook her head, and again advised delay.

"I might wait," said Lord Edward, "if you were to remain here; but since you are going abroad for months, perhaps for years, I feel that it is better to know my fate at once. No one can see without admiring her."

"Isabel's head will not be turned by mere admiration, of which she was the object just now; it is simply distasteful to her."

"I know; it was the absence of self-consciousness and personal vanity which first attracted me, so different from others I

have known. But that may not prevent her affections being engaged by another more fortunate than I, if we part without an explanation. In short, I cannot bear suspense."

And all Ruth's prudent warnings were of no avail. Lord Edward was as ardent, possibly a more unreasonable lover, than if he had been ten years younger. Ruth could only repeat her wishes for his success, and listen to his animated praises of Isabel's graces, both of mind and person.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

So selten ist es, dass die Menschen finden
Was ihnen doch bestimmt gewesen schien
So selten, dass sie das erhalten, was
Auch einmal die beglückte Hand ergriff!
Es reißt sich los, was wir begierig fassten.
Es giebt ein Glück, allein wir kennen's nicht:
Wir kennen's wohl, und wissen's nicht zu schätzen.

GOETHE.

"Oh, Ruth," said Isabel, opening the door of her sister's room in haste, and carefully closing it before she finished her sentence, — "Oh, Ruth! do you know what Lord Edward has done?"

"He told me yesterday what he was going to do," said Ruth.

"It was only yesterday that I had the faintest suspicion, and then I thought it must be fancy."

"But though I know what Lord Edward was to ask, Isabel, I have not heard your answer."

"No, thank you, of course."

"And why of course?" said Ruth, gently.

"Oh, Ruth! as if I could ever love again?"

Ruth was not disposed to argue the propriety of first and only love, and she merely said —

"I am sorry for Lord Edward."

"So am I. When he began, it made me so hot and uncomfortable, that I nearly asked him to stop, for fear I should say 'Yes' by mistake. I admired so much the way he bore his

disappointment about Clara, thinking that he conquered his love only because he thought it right, and then we never can forget the way he nursed David. So that, altogether, I liked him exceedingly, and I hoped that we should always be friends."

Admiration, gratitude, and friendship; since Isabel acknowledged these sentiments, Ruth regretted more than ever that Lord Edward's precipitation should have prevented their ripening into love.

"Such friendship is not quite compatible with youth and beauty," she observed.

"But you do not think that I trifled with him," said Isabel, anxiously. "Lord Edward himself said that I gave him no encouragement."

"No; I did not give him any hope," said Ruth, "and he was not sanguine of success."

"I hope that he will not mind much," said Isabel; "only think how long, and how hopelessly, he loved Clara."

"I am afraid," replied her sister, "that only proves of what enduring sentiments he is capable."

"I am glad you do not plead his cause, however," said Isabel, after a pause; "it would be easy to say that he is more worthy than — than Captain Gascoigne; I do not mean to deny it. But that does not make it less impossible ever to think of another in the same way."

"I understand what you mean, dear," said Ruth, tenderly; "but it is only painful and harassing to rake up the past."

"And, besides," continued Isabel, "I would not leave David, even if I liked him better. He is as little likely to forget as I am, and we have agreed to live for each other. But you look as if you did not believe me."

"I do not mean to be incredulous," said Ruth, suppressing the smile which had called forth the accusation, "but you must remember that David is not four-and-twenty; so do not think his inconstancy quite unparalleled if he falls in and out of love again before the year goes round."

David himself, when he heard of the proposal, was not dis-

posed to accept such a sacrifice from sisterly affection. He liked the idea of the marriage, and tried to persuade Isabel that she had not known her own mind. And when she persisted in her decision, he deplored her taste, observing, that he always thought Lynmere a much finer fellow than the Captain.

Lord Edward returned to his parliamentary duties on the same day, and this flying visit served as a matter of speculation in Holmdale. With habitual courtesy, he had left a card on Miss Perrott, and she considered that the attention entitled her to ascertain the truth; so she set forth next morning to call in Bean-street, and she found Ruth alone, which was in favour of her researches.

"So Lord Edward is gone again," she said; "I was quite disappointed to miss him when he called yesterday morning; and then I met the Doctor, who said that I should be sure to see him again, as he was to be here for some days."

"He did not tell us how long he was to stay," said Ruth; "and Parliament is still sitting."

"Then perhaps he is coming back again?"

Ruth said that she believed not.

"People do say," continued Miss Perrott, "that he had some object in this second visit. He has seen more of Isabel, otherwise I should be inclined to think that it was you, for you are much better suited to him."

"You have become an inveterate matchmaker, Miss Perrott," said Ruth, with a smile.

"Well, my dear, I don't deny that people like you or I may be very happy in single life; but it is a different kind of happiness, and I don't think it would suit Isabel. I should be really provoked to think that she has thrown over Lord Edward for the sake of that worthless Captain Gascoigne; and, indeed, it would not be quite right, now that he is fairly married to some one else."

"Isabel has time enough before her," said Ruth; "and at present she is quite satisfied in having David to live for and to love."

"That is all very well," said Miss Perrott, with a knowing

shake of the head; "but young people will look for something else."

"But we need not look for them," said Ruth. "Do you know that you have not asked after David?"

"Because I heard all about him from Mr. Ball on my way here. He says that he is going on charmingly, and will be quite able to move in three or four weeks. I could not help bemoaning your departure with the Doctor the other day; we agreed that we should miss you sadly; but it is hardest on me, for you see so little of him now. And you will find some gayer place to settle in, and never come back to your old home and friends."

"I do not expect to like any other place so well," said Ruth.

The words had scarcely passed her lips when Dr. Berkeley entered the room. He was, as Miss Perrott observed, an unwonted visitor, and there was now so much constraint in their intercourse that the presence of a third person was a relief both to him and Ruth. But as her rheumatism did not permit Miss Perrott to be out after three o'clock, she soon took leave, and they were left together.

"You were talking of leaving Holmdale when I came in," said Dr. Berkeley.

"Yes; we begin to feel unsettled now. We have bought a *Murray* and a map, and Isabel pores over them all day."

"And you are really sorry to go?"

"Yes," Ruth answered, in an unsteady voice; "the other two say that it shows great want of enterprise, and I mean to enjoy seeing the world as much as I can. But I have suffered too much in this place to leave it willingly; it is almost like parting with mamma over again."

"Yet when the parting is over you may find life less burdensome. I know," Dr. Berkeley added, nervously, "how much I have added to your cares here."

"But by my fault," said Ruth; "and for that I shall reproach myself as much when I am far away as I do now."

"You need not do so. When you are gone, I shall soon learn to think of you as you wish, and we may be friends once

more. You will let me write to you sometimes to tell you the Holmdale news, and also if I have any tidings of Jasper."

Ruth's thanks were too heartfelt to be spoken, and she started another subject —

"Did Lord Edward confide to you the cause of his departure? I tried to baffle Miss Perrott's curiosity; but you have a right to know, in virtue of your guardianship."

"He said something not very coherent, from which I concluded that Isabel had refused him."

"Yes; it was his own fault for asking her too soon. If he had only waited."

"Perhaps if he will ask again it may come to the same thing," said the Doctor, a little dryly.

Ruth smiled, and said that she had not the assurance to ask him to come to Malta on what might be only a bootless errand.

CHAPTER XL.

O days and hours, your work is this,
To hold me from my proper place,
A little while from his embrace
For fuller gain of after bliss!

That out of distance might ensue
Desire of nearness doubly sweet;
And unto meeting, when we meet,
Delight a hundredfold accrue.

In Memoriam.

It was longer than Mr. Ball had anticipated before David's strength was so far restored as to admit of their leaving Holmdale. On May-day their departure took place; and though Isabel had anticipated the time with impatience, she found the process of leave-taking so little exhilarating, that she broke down altogether when the moment came for shaking hands with Sally; and she threw herself back in the carriage which was to convey them to the station, in order to indulge in a hearty fit of crying. Ruth, on the contrary, sat forward, pale and tearless, that she might look her last at each familiar object, and most longingly at the alley of limes, now in all their freshness, which

shaded the church pathway. Although David could enter into his sister's feelings, his sigh was simply one of relief when they left the last house behind them. He was glad to turn over a page on which he could dwell with little satisfaction; and craving for change of thought and scene is almost inseparable from the variable and depressing nature of his illness.

"People all seemed so sorry to lose us," Isabel said, when she had recovered her voice, "that I felt I had been unfeeling in wishing to go; and now I can only justify it by believing that they were only sorry on your account, Ruth. No one will mind getting rid of me."

"At least," said Ruth, "you must take Sir John's farewell visit entirely as an attention to you. You were always his favourite."

"Sir John's visit was almost more touching than any," said Isabel; "he looked so forlorn, as if he was at a loss what to do without Clara to admire. At one time he seemed to be on the point of suggesting that we should come and keep house for him, and I began to cast about for some answer more polite than 'No, thank you, I would rather not.'"

"I am sorry that I missed Sir John," said David. "Did he say anything of — of the Gascoignes? It saves trouble," he added, with a short laugh, "when the bride does not change her name."

"Yes; he said that they were in Belgrave-square, and that he was going up to town next week to join them," said Ruth.

"Perhaps," continued David, "you would like to call to-morrow, and see the bride in all her finery."

"No, thank you, David. As Isabel said just now, I had rather not."

"Did you see any one as we drove through the town, Ruth?" Isabel asked.

"Only the Doctor."

"Only?" repeated David. "I have some suspicion that the Doctor takes our departure more to heart than any one."

"I hope not," said Ruth, quietly, as she evaded her brother's searching gaze. She had never confessed the true state of the case, but David had made his own observations.

"The Doctor has his own resources," observed Isabel. "He will learn a new language, or take greater pains than ever to bring on a promising pupil, so as to drive out vexing thoughts. I am most sorry for poor Miss Perrott. She has so few interests in life —"

"That she devised one in tormenting us," interposed David. "How she did worry me yesterday to wear flannel next the skin! I disputed the necessity for half an hour; and when she had worked herself into a fever, and proved that I was throwing away my precious life, I quietly told her that I had worn it from my earliest infancy."

"Poor Miss Perrott," said Isabel, checking an involuntary smile. "It was a shame to tease her."

"She will miss us," observed Ruth; "but her life is less objectless than it was. She takes an interest in her district, and carries on a jangling friendship with Mr. Mayne. And then there are the Dunns —"

"There are the Dunns, as you observe," said David. "Isabel may well say, poor Miss Perrott." And he turned the conversation to other matters.

No part of the busy day they spent in London was occupied by a visit to Belgrave-square, and on the following morning they set out on their route for Dover and Ostend. It was still too early in the season for Switzerland and the Tyrol, and they lingered for some days among the Belgian towns. Isabel's enjoyment of their travels increased with every step they took; all cares were cast aside, and her energy was as untiring as her admiration. David also gained strength daily; but fatigue and excitement did not suit Ruth so well. She looked fagged and languid, secretly pining for the solitude and regularity of her former life; and, on her account, it was decided that they should remain for a few days at Bonn.

"At any rate, we must have stopped for a night or two," said David, when they were locked up in the *Salle d'Attente* at Cologne. "As I opened my desk just now to exchange our good gold for that debased Prussian silver, I discovered the Doctor's letter of introduction to his friend the German pro-

fessor. He particularly requested us to make acquaintance with his learned and unseen correspondent; and then Ruth shall write and tell him how dirty his friend is, how hairy, and what is the length of his meerschäum."

"He ought to ask us to dinner," said Isabel. "If we see a little of German life, it will repay us for the trouble of unpacking some presentable clothes."

"I am glad that you are modest enough to talk of *seeing*," said David. "It is evident that your intercourse will go no further, since you still have recourse to my voluble and ungrammatical French, which you prophesied would be of no further use when we reached the Prussian frontier."

"It is very mortifying," rejoined Isabel laughing. "I speak on scientific principles, yet I can get no answer but the terrible *Wie meinen Sie?* or, which is still more insulting, 'Speak English, and I shall understand.' And if the natives originate a remark, I have not a glimmering consciousness of its meaning."

"If the natives were to act instead of speaking, it would be more to the purpose," said David. "Unless that gentleman in the military cap will unlock the door, I shall be under the necessity of breaking it open with his head."

"My dear boy!" said Ruth, in an admonitory tone, "he understands English."

"He certainly does not," retorted David, "or he would not shut up a free and enlightened people in this stifling atmosphere."

They were released in due time, and permitted to take their places in the train for Bonn. Ruth was glad that the flat and uninteresting country through which they passed entitled her to lean back in her corner of the carriage with closed eyes; and while her brother and sister still talked in undertones, and thought she slept, her thoughts were free to wander back to her forsaken home, with all its associations of joy and grief.

They were all well pleased with Bonn. Isabel declared, as she had repeated at every successive stage of their journey, that the church with its five tall towers, and the Rhine with its seven hills, were the most perfect things they had seen yet, and more perfect

than anything which could be in store for them. She was charmed by the suggestion that they should drink tea in the arbour overhanging the Rhine, at the foot of the garden attached to the *Königlicher Hof*; and she was inspired with quotations in praise of Vater Rhein, poured forth in the pretty correct German which had proved so useless for the purposes of communication, until she was checked in full career by a reminiscence from David of the earwigs which fell into Mrs. Nickleby's tea in the arbour, "and kicked dreadfully."

It was a lovely evening; not warm, but bright and still, and after tea they sauntered through the town, speculating which was the house of the Doctor's German professor; and then they paced the chestnut avenue, and watched the fireflies glancing through the grass, long after Ruth had decreed that it was imprudent for David to stay out so late.

"And now," said Isabel, when they met at breakfast next morning, "we ought to take advantage of the fine day, and go up the *Drachenfels* before dinner."

Her companions were amused by her energy, but not inclined to imitate it. Ruth had letters to write, and David declared that he felt more inclined for society than scenery — at all events, he would not go until he had taken counsel of the German professor concerning the merits of *Königswinter asses*. So Isabel, after railing at their want of enterprise, left the one to her letters, the other to Galignani, and she set forth alone to explore the town. She soon returned, however, to make another effort to rouse her brother, declaring that she did not like to walk without him; foreigners were so civil in general, but one man had stared disagreeably, and followed her a little way, almost as if he was going to speak to her.

"One of the *Burschen*?" David asked.

"Oh no; at least, I think he was too old. He was a tall man, with moustaches — a foreigner, of course."

"Of course," repeated David; "notwithstanding what you said just now of the civility of foreigners, I am certain no Englishman would be so ill-bred. It is astonishing how patriotic

I become on this side of the water. We will sally forth together in search of the Professor; and if we meet the fellow again, I have German enough to say, '*Wie meinen Sie?*'"

They saw no more of him, and Isabel had altogether forgotten the annoyance by the time they returned.

"Well, Ruth," she said, in such haste to tell her adventures that she threw down her bonnet in the headlong fashion on which Jasper used to animadvert in days gone by — "Well, Ruth, we found Herr Stahl. We only meant to leave the letter, but the maid begged us to walk in; and so we did. He is a quaint, little old man, with no hair on his face, and so little on his head that he wears a black velvet skull-cap. David can tell you more about him than I can, for I was talking to his wife, who is much younger, and speaks the prettiest broken English. They asked us to a *Kaffeetinken* in their garden at four o'clock, and so we are to go."

"Why, I thought we were engaged to the Siebengebirge," said Ruth.

"They will not run away, as David says; and it would be a pity to miss such an opportunity of seeing German life. Now, remember, Ruthie, how often you have told me not to be morose on occasion of a Holmdale tea-drinking."

Ruth did remember it; and she suffered Isabel to unpack their black silk gowns, as well as the small cap of choice old lace, which had been Miss Perrott's parting gift.

"If you imagine that it gives you the air of a chaperon, you are much mistaken," said Isabel; "it is so becoming that you will only get the credit of a successful piece of coxcombry."

David was equally well pleased; he declared that he had never been worthy of his sisters' dark eyes, and clear, olive complexions, until he came into this land of fair-haired Germans; and he was really not ashamed to present them as specimens of his countrywomen. Isabel was inclined to wish herself on the Drachenfels, when they were ushered into the best parlour of the Professor's house, instead of the cheerful sitting-room in which their visit had been paid. An air of constraint pervaded the white paint and gilding, the mirrors and marble-topped

tables; and the guests, who were ladies for the most part, conversed with each other in a low, guttural murmur, which was wholly unintelligible to her ear. But their hostess came forward to greet the strangers in pleasant, idiomatic English, and introduced the wearer of a Prussian uniform to "his brother Hauptmann," though David laughingly disclaimed any such equality of rank.

"And, besides," continued the Frau Professorin, "it rejoices me to have here one of your own countrymen; he is even now in the garden with Karl, but for this surprise have I not prepared him. He is so what we in our tongue call *fremd, verschlossen*."

"And we, reserved," said Ruth, with a smile; "I am afraid that it is an English failing."

"But he is not like an Englishman," said Madame Stahl; "he speaks his own tongue even so badly as I myself; but his German is *vortrefflich*, and he is full of learning, although so young. He is even now made Professor at Heidelberg, by means of my husband, with whom he has studied, and who likes him well; but for me, I know him not at all. He speaks seldom, and lives much to himself; and I forbade Karl to tell him that it was a *Kaffeetrinken*, lest he should excuse himself from coming."

"And what is his name?" Isabel asked, with eager interest; for the instinct of romance was aroused by this description.

"His real name I know not, but he pleases to be called Herr Kleinod; though he makes no secret of his nation, and attends ever your church. With many he passes for a German."

The solid, fresh-coloured maid announced that coffee was served; and the guests obeyed the summons with alacrity, glad to exchange the room, with its closed windows, for the cool freshness of the garden. As usual at these gatherings, there was a succession of small, green tables and chairs set out, so that the party was broken into sets, each sipping coffee, and enjoying life after their own fashion, without paying much

attention to their neighbours. Isabel looked anxiously round in search of the two professors; but they were not to be seen, so she accepted her brother's invitation to join him and the young officer, while Ruth sat beside their hostess, who was still more charmed with her gentle gravity than she had been with the greater animation of her brother and sister. But the duties of hospitality imposed too many claims upon her to leave more than a divided attention for Ruth, who was, on her part, well pleased to sit silent and observe the scene before her.

"Ah!" the Frau Professorin presently exclaimed; "I see there Karl, and with him your countryman. I will bring him to you."

She rose accordingly; and Ruth watched her progress with interest, in order to discover which was this mysterious Herr Kleinod. When Madame Stahl addressed herself to two persons, coming down one of the alleys of cropped acacia, it was easy to distinguish the Professor by Isabel's description, in the small, withered man, whose scanty white hairs were surmounted by a velvet cap. His companion was a young and powerful man, whose dress and air, the turn of his moustaches, and his short hair, might have justified any one in regarding him as a native of Germany; and, indeed, Ruth could scarcely believe that the courteous gesture with which he took off his hat, and remained for a moment uncovered, when Madame Stahl addressed him, could have been acquired by a foreigner, the action was so distinctly national.

There was a brief colloquy; and Madame Stahl returned, laughing.

"He will not come; he says he dare not encounter such a crowd; and so you must be Mahomet, Miss Lennox, and even come to the mountain."

Ruth, half-unwillingly, rose to comply with the request; but the stranger did not await her approach. For a moment he stood irresolute; and then a flush, which was apparent even through his bronzed and sunburnt complexion, overspread his face, while he turned hastily away, and retraced his steps up the alley.

"So ist es immer!" ejaculated the elder Professor, as he proceeded to apologize for the discourtesy of his friend. With him, he assured Ruth, no man was more agreeable, but Herr Kleinod ever drew back from intercourse with his own countrymen.

Isabel had been much amused by the incident; and she detained her sister for a moment, when she was about to return to her seat. "After all, Ruth," she said, "I believe that we have not missed much. The man is certainly a great bear, for he is the same who stared so disagreeably this morning."

"I must go back to Madame Stahl, dear," said Ruth, disengaging herself from her sister's grasp. In truth her limbs trembled, and her pulses throbbed so much that she was unable to stand, and yet she dared not ask herself the cause of her agitation. The idea was too strange, wild, and incredible, to be entertained for an instant.

CHAPTER XLL

Be not amazed at life. 'Tis still
The mode of God with His elect,
Their hopes exactly to fulfil
In times and ways they least expect.

The Angel in the House.

COFFEE and conversation came to an end together, and David and his sisters took leave of the Stahls, and set out for their hotel. But the entrance to the Alte Zoll, the terrace overhanging the Rhine, looked attractive, and they turned in there, to watch the sunset, and to talk over the incidents of the afternoon. There they remained until David, chilly as usual, proclaimed the necessity of a brisk walk; and as Ruth was too tired to move, she was left sitting on one of the benches a little retired from the broad walk, while her brother and sister went off together. She could still see the rich purple colour of the Siebengebirge, their jagged outline cutting sharp against the evening sky, and through the trees she caught a glimpse of the broad and rushing stream; but though these things were

obvious to the outward senses, her thoughts were far away. And while she sat thus, she was startled by a voice, which, though familiar, seemed more allied with her dreams than with the scene before her.

"Then you do not, or will not know me?"

Ruth looked up, and saw the same person who had shunned an introduction so shortly before, standing before her. What had that tall, whiskered man, with well-formed features and a frame so remarkable for muscular strength, in common with the boyish figure still fresh in her recollection? She knew not; rather she knew too well, not daring to acknowledge the truth to herself, since his look, his accent, his very tones, were changed. She did not speak, but stood up, trembling.

"Speak, Ruth, do you know me?"

He called her by name! It was, it must be, Jasper! Yet, by a strange impulse, Ruth turned from him, and advanced a few paces, so as to place her hands upon the balustrade, unconscious that she was followed, until Jasper spoke again.

"Perhaps, Ruth, you would have been better pleased to pass unrecognised; and so I might have escaped this miserable consciousness of being considered unworthy of one word of welcome from those I have so yearned to see."

Ruth felt that the reproach was just. In acting over this scene in imagination, as she had often done, she had schooled herself to be composed and guarded; but the event overthrew all her calculations. An icy barrier of constraint seemed to have sprung up between them, and she could not show, she could not, at that moment, even feel, the deep and absorbing interest which had never flagged in all the foregoing years of mysterious estrangement. She looked up once more, and said, faintly —

"At first, I did not know you."

"Nor I you; Isabel is more like what you were, and I almost spoke to her this morning."

"Isabel and David will be so glad."

"Even though you, Ruth, are indifferent? My heart fails when I think of encountering another such chilling greeting.

It were better to be gone, and to leave you to forget that you have ever seen me."

"Forgive me," whispered Ruth. "It is all so new and so strange. Yet do not say that I am indifferent."

"Then you are not ashamed to speak to me?"

"Oh, Jasper!" And that answer would have been sufficient, even if Ruth had not slipped her hand within his, and suffered him to lead her back to the bench, where they might sit and talk, secure from observation.

On both sides there was much to tell; but Jasper's own account of himself may be given in fewer words. In leaving Holmdale, he had yielded to a blind and irresistible impulse to escape from infamy, aware that he could only have redeemed his own honour by implicating his father. And probably a shrinking dread of any further intercourse with that father was another powerful incentive to flight. He made his way to Liverpool with the intention of securing a berth in some outward-bound vessel; and in order to raise money for this purpose, by the sale of his watch, he entered a jeweller's shop. While there, an apparently accidental circumstance wholly altered his destination. The master of the shop was a German, whose knowledge of English was so imperfect that Jasper found it easier to drive a bargain with him in his own tongue. He had a turn for languages, and spoke German with ease and correctness; but before the negotiation for the sale of his watch had made much progress, he was surprised by an offer of a very different nature. The jeweller had been directed to engage a tutor for the son of a certain Baron von Orsbach, residing in the neighbourhood of Bonn; and he was so prepossessed in Jasper's favour that he proposed that he should himself accept the situation. Friendless and destitute as he was, Jasper did not hesitate to close with the offer; much to his surprise, his own account of himself was accepted without demur; and before the interest excited by his mysterious disappearance had subsided in Holmdale, he was installed in the swampy Schloss von Orsbach, with its suites of unfurnished rooms, its ancestral frogs and poplars. The years of dependence which followed had been animated by

the one absorbing object of freeing himself from the burden of debt and dishonour which crushed his spirit. That object was only accomplished at the cost of incessant toil, since he applied himself to every species of literary drudgery which might eke out the sum he was able to lay aside out of his scanty salary. But the labour had been bracing rather than exhausting, and had stimulated the powers of mind which Dr. Berkeley had always asserted were only lying dormant, and must sooner or later achieve distinction. The extraordinary mastery of the German language acquired by a foreigner had first attracted Professor Stahl to the young Englishman, and they had ever since been fast friends.

"He determined to make a German of me," continued Jasper, "in which you will say that he has succeeded tolerably well. He directed all my studies, made me go through the University course here, and then obtained this professorship for me at Heidelberg. I ceased to be bear-leader to the young Otto von Orsbach as soon as the 200*l.* was transmitted to Holmdale, and gave myself up to the luxury of learning, though now, it seems, the days of tuition are to begin once more. You see how much I owe to Stahl; but I can tell you what has proved a closer bond than gratitude — his correspondence with '*ein gelehrter Herr, Berkeley genannt.*' Imagine how my heart leaped when I first heard the name; and from that time I saw all the Doctor's letters, though they only awakened an unsatisfied yearning for news of you all. How I have chafed and fretted, and then laughed at my own folly for seeking your name or David's among a list of old Greek manuscripts."

"It was your own fault," Ruth answered. "Oh, Jasper, it was cruel to let all those years go by without one sign of life."

"It was better so," said he, gloomily. "I wished that you should think me dead, for then I knew that you would judge me kindly. If, indeed, I had known what you have now told, I might have acted otherwise."

For Ruth had already told him of his father's death, and of the full disclosure which preceded it, while Jasper held his

breath, and listened with shuddering interest. He was touched by the Doctor's anxiety to clear his name.

"If I had imagined," he said, "that there was one living being to take an interest in me, or who thought me other than a reprobate, I might have compelled myself to renew some intercourse; but, even now, no earthly power should induce me to return to Holmdale, though I like to hear all the familiar names once more. I want to hear of the Doctor; is he aged?"

"A little," said Ruth.

"And seeing you reminds me of another absorbing interest of buried days. Are there changes at Dyne Court? — or is Clara Gascoigne Clara Gascoigne still?"

The question was asked in a tone of unconcern, which made Ruth's heart bound, although she was ashamed of the momentary exultation.

"Yes; but only because she has married her cousin, Evelyn Gascoigne. I have not pained you by telling you so abruptly, Jasper?"

"Not at all. I have a certain tenderness for the only romance my life is likely to know; but it ended long ago, and was always visionary. There is nothing like hard head-work for driving out vexing thoughts, and I am content to give myself up to student life without such a pretty and useless addition to my household goods as our friend the Professor has in Madame Stahl, who always says the wrong thing at the wrong moment, and consults her husband concerning the shades of Berlin wool in his smoking-cap when we are in the midst of a scientific discussion."

"I dare say," returned Ruth, with a smile, "it is from a conscientious belief that it would be much better for you to unbend your mind by a little attention to the amenities of life."

"Very likely; but she has only confirmed my determination to resist all such impertinent intrusion into my den at Heidelberg. And now let me hear of yourself, Ruth. You will believe," he added, with one hasty glance at her mourning dress, "that it is not forgetfulness which sealed my lips, when I refrained from asking after *one*."

"Thank you," said Ruth, as her lip quivered in the attempt to smile. "I felt that you must know it was. It is at such times that her loss comes home, for she would have entered into our present happiness. I like to believe that she is doing so even now."

"So your home was broken up and you came abroad," said Jasper. "Or was it on account of your health?"

"On David's account. He has been seriously ill, though now he gains ground so fast that you would scarcely think so."

"No. He always looked delicate, and he is altogether less altered than the rest of us. For though Isabel has even surpassed her promise of beauty, she gives me the impression of having suffered a good deal before her spirits were toned down. Though she did not seem unhappy either when I was watching you this evening."

"Yet you are right," said Ruth, "in thinking that she has suffered enough to grow old before her time; and I cannot help regretting the joyous, lawless spirits which used to offend your propriety in old times. If anything can rouse them again, it will be the instinct of braving your displeasure."

"And you, Ruth," continued Jasper, "are you not changed more than any of us?"

"Oh, no. You know that I was always quiet; and I don't grow more noisy with increasing years."

It was quite dusk before David and Isabel returned; and they were beginning to apologize for having left Ruth so long alone, playfully disputing whose fault it was, before they discovered that she was not alone after all. And Isabel was still more perplexed when a tall figure rose up from the bench, and introduced himself in an accent which Madame Stahl was justified in considering more like that of a foreigner than an Englishman, as "the man who stared so disagreeably."

The explanation soon followed; and Jasper had no cause to complain, as in Ruth's case, that it was received with indifference. David almost shook off his hand in the eagerness of his satisfaction, while Isabel evinced her excitement by kissing Ruth, and asking if she was content at last.

Ruth was the first to remember that it was imprudent for David to linger in the night air, and they repaired to the hotel; nor was Jasper suffered to take leave of them at the door, as he proposed to do.

"For you know," said Isabel, "that I have not *seen* you yet, except in the character of a mysterious stranger, and I want to ascertain how much of your old self is left."

"Or, rather, how much of a new self is added," said David. "Now that I see what a great man Clinton has become, I am sadly mortified by my own smallness of stature."

Jasper followed them up-stairs, and Isabel called for candles, and held up one in order to make her inspection, which he endured with an air of dignified submission very amusing to the bystanders.

"After all," Isabel decided, "you are less changed than I fancied. The great difference is, that your features have grown up to your forehead, and I should have known your mouth anywhere if you had not disguised it with such a moustache. How amused the Doctor will be to hear that you are a moustached professor, with a ring on your fore-finger."

Jasper looked down, disconcerted by this last proof of disloyalty to English customs, which had not escaped Isabel's quick eyes.

"It is not my fault, Isabel. The ring was Otto von Orsbach's parting present, and it will only fit my forefinger."

"I understand," said Isabel, laughing; "a seal of your denaturalization. Yet, after all, Jasper, England is not such a bad country."

"It was only too good for me," replied Jasper, in a tone which effectually checked Isabel's inclination for raillery. His sensitiveness to ridicule was, as she afterwards observed to David, a much stronger proof of his identity than the resemblance which she had attempted to trace to his former self.

In truth, five years' estrangement in a foreign land, beginning at that most pliable age when the transition from youth to manhood was not fully made, had wrought a greater change in Jasper's outward habits and appearance than the lapse of

time might seem to warrant; but his disposition was still the same, the tone of his mind as high, his sense of honour only too morbidly quick. Now that the apparently inseparable barrier between him and the home and companions of his boyhood was broken down, he threw himself back into the past with eager interest, his accurate recollection of old acquaintance and familiar scenes proving that it was not indifference which had so long kept him silent. He stayed talking so late, that David took up his candle with a yawn as soon as he was gone, declaring that not even the wonders of this discovery should defraud him of his allowance of eight hours' sleep.

The sisters were left standing together at the open window.

"You are happy now, Ruth," said Isabel, twining her arm round her.

"Happy and thankful, dear."

"It is very pleasant. I was infected by Clara's absurd idea of the gold-digger, and expected to see something quite uncivilized, if he ever did turn up. I can hardly now believe that he is a learned man and a professor, and but for the charms of Heidelberg, I should still be in favour of a cottage in the back-woods."

"It is best as it is," said Ruth. "Jasper's mind must work on something, and manual labour would not have satisfied him."

Isabel was too prudent to reveal that she was not thinking *only* of Jasper.

"Yes; I remember how the Doctor used to say that he was the stuff of which philosophers were made, and he will rejoice in the fulfilment of his prediction. We must write to him at once, Ruth; and I hope that he will tell the story to Lord Edward when they meet. He was so much interested in what he heard of Jasper when we brought David from York, and all Holmdale was ringing with the restitution of the money."

As neither of the sisters saw any harm in match-making for the other, Ruth was gratified by this reminiscence of Lord Edward, and by the blush which accompanied it.

CHAPTER XLII.

Hopes, and fears that kindle hope,
An undistinguishable throng;
And gentle wishes long subdued,
Subdued and cherished long!

S. T. COLERIDGE.

THREE days afterwards, Jasper set out for Heidelberg, in company with David and his sisters. No pleasanter resting-place could be devised, until the season for travelling in Switzerland had arrived; and Jasper claimed Ruth's experience in household affairs to aid his first attempts at housekeeping. Isabel was irritated by her sister's literal interpretation of the request; time after time she left them together, only to find them on their return, calculating the number of silver spoons, and the stock of house-linen required for a bachelor's establishment. Although Jasper preferred Ruth's society to that of any other person, there was nothing lover-like in his manner, while, on her side, there was an additional shade of reserve, but no apparent embarrassment.

Isabel spent the greater part of the day on the Rhine, in the forepart of the steamer, with Jasper by her side, who was able to name every rock and castle, without reference to *Murray* or the panorama. Just as they were under the shadow of Ehrenbreitstein, however, Jasper forgot his part of cicerone, and after answering Isabel's expressions of admiration at random, he said abruptly —

"I observed, Isabel, that Ruth coloured when David made that allusion to the Doctor at dinner, though he seemed to speak in jest."

"The Doctor was in earnest, however," said Isabel, rather dryly.

"Then there *was* love on his side? It is strange — yet not strange — except that it should have failed to meet with a return; for Ruth used to admire and rely upon him so much."

"Yes, at the time you knew them together. But you were the cause of coolness and constraint."

"I was?"

"I mean," continued Isabel, desperately, for she was alarmed by the effect of words which had slipped out unawares, while she felt that she must go on since she had embarked in the subject; "I mean that Ruth could never quite forgive him for not sharing her confidence in your unblemished honour. You know that appearances were against you."

"You may well say so," answered Jasper. "And Ruth trusted me through all? She never told me."

"Then I am sorry that you should know it through me; for, though I do not always understand her reserve, I always feel that it is sacred."

"Ruth used not to be reserved with me," said Jasper.

"Perhaps not; but you must accept that result of your long and selfish neglect; for it *was* selfish to be silent through all these years, as if the memory of your close friendship had been blotted out. You know not, and are not worthy to know, all the suffering you caused her."

Isabel spoke with flushed cheeks and a faltering voice, and the colour also rushed into Jasper's face. But he only replied by the German monosyllable "*So!*" which may convey so much or so little meaning; and then he advised their return to the other end of the vessel, since they were only in the way of the knot of people preparing to disembark at Coblenz.

Isabel looked anxiously for some change in his manner to Ruth, but none was apparent, except that he spoke to her rather less than before. Isabel was bitterly, unreasonably indignant, and only induced to curb her resentment by perceiving that Ruth was pained by her flighty and inconsequent manner. She did not feel relieved until they reached Mainz, where they were to pass the night. She set out with David to explore the town, which gave her an opportunity of telling him that Jasper was totally, irretrievably ruined; she had tried to like him, but now she was convinced that he was nothing but a selfish, boorish, beer-drinking German.

"You ought to have come to that conclusion a little sooner,"

and David, laughing; "I discovered that you two were at issue

this afternoon; and if your tempers are so incompatible, we should not have allowed the Stahls to write and engage the lodgings for us at the Castle. Jasper was always unlike other people, but I still think him a very good fellow; and if there is any crime in drinking beer, I must refute the calumny as far as he is concerned, since I can testify that he has drunk nothing but sour wine since we met."

"I do not mean that he is *all that* at present," said Isabel, a little ashamed of her vehemence; "but it is what he will inevitably become if he is to live only for himself, his comforts, and his books — a regular old *Hagestoltz*, in short."

"Which is German for a bachelor, is it not? So there is a melancholy prospect for us."

"Not at all; we are to live for each other, and be bright exceptions to the rule. However, you think me unreasonable; so I will forgive Jasper this time, and try to understand him better — even though a standing feud might make our life in the old Castle all the more real and pleasant."

In accordance with this good resolution, she treated Jasper with greater civility next morning, and before reaching Heidelberg they had returned to their former relations — amicable, but rather defensive.

Two days after this, Ruth stood beside Jasper, on the broad Altan overhanging the Neckar and the town of Heidelberg, to watch the yellow light of sunset. The steepness of the ascent to the Castle had obliged her to accept the assistance which in general she declined, and her hand still rested on his arm, when Jasper spoke, in the low, measured tone which veils emotion —

"I hardly dare thank you, Ruth, and yet I cannot be silent, for having maintained my innocence in the face of detraction; since you knew no more than others."

"I *felt* the truth. But who told you, Jasper?"

"Isabel; though she said truly that I was unworthy to know it. To her I would not justify myself — to you I cannot; I only seek forgiveness."

"For what? Oh, Jasper, why will you pain me so much?"

"Forgive me all the sorrow I have caused you, then and now. You cannot, you must not take any further interest in one so unworthy of you. Forget that you have ever known me; leave me to my cheerless and solitary fate." And, with an impatient gesture, Jasper shook off the little hand which trembled on his arm.

But Ruth placed it there again, and said, softly —

"I cannot forget, Jasper."

"You cannot! Do you remember what I am — a dishonoured name my sole inheritance; a morose and gloomy temper my sole endowment?"

"I know what you are," answered Ruth; "the same Jasper who cared for me as a friend or a brother in early days — who, as a brother, cares for me still."

"Not so," said Jasper, now clasping the hand which he had flung from him a moment before; "the memory of those early days has not faded — the image of that loving and gentle sister was enshrined in my inmost heart, dear as my own life, yet not so dear as the sweet reality. Speak to me, Ruth; I do not plead my cause; I dare not ask you to be mine; you know what I am."

"I know," said Ruth.

And that answer was sufficient. It drew down Jasper's lips to imprint the kiss of betrothal on her brow; heroism and self-sacrifice were forgotten — all but the bond, stronger than death, which linked that loving form to his side.

With perfect sincerity, Isabel declared that this "selfish, boorish, beer-drinking German" was the brother-in-law whom of all others she would have chosen; and she was gratified by the conviction that her good offices had been needed to bring the affair to a happy conclusion.

"Now, do tell me," she said, one evening, not long before the wedding-day; "were you not waiting for that friendly shove to fall in love with Ruth?"

"You never were more mistaken," replied Jasper, briefly.

"That is a polite contradiction! However, perhaps I put the question a little too strongly. But, at least, you will allow that I set the stone rolling."

"I will allow anything you please, if you will leave me in peace," said Jasper; and Isabel laughed and took the hint. The lovers were left in possession of the sitting-room, while she went to join David, who was smoking among the ruins, greeting him with the remark that, though she thoroughly liked Jasper, she could not help wishing that his manner was less uncouth. But real courtesy was a rare gift in these days. Had one who certainly possessed the gift in full measure any place in her thoughts?

CHAPTER XLIII.

The laws of marriage, character'd in gold
 Upon the blanchèd tablets of her heart;
 A love still burning upward, giving light
 To read those laws; an accent very low,
 In blandishment, but a most silver flow
 Of subtle-paced counsel in distress,
 Right to the heart and brain, though undescried,
 Winning its way with extreme gentleness
 Through all the outworks of suspicious pride.

TENNISON.

"Is Mrs. Clinton at home?"

The English question, the English tone, was never more welcome; for Mrs. Clinton recognised the voice at once, and ran out into the trellised porch to answer for herself. In her black silk dress and lace cap, she looked as matronly as if she had been married for years, instead of months. The expression of staid and quiet happiness was scarcely bridal, but it was very characteristic. The oval outline of her face and its returning colour, showed that youth and health were renewed together.

"Oh, Lord Edward! I am so glad to see you."

"And I am delighted to find you at home, and in such a pretty home. I had not time to write and announce my movements." Lord Edward was one of those men who never have time to write.

"I did not expect to hear again," said Ruth, "after I had written that you would always find a spare room."

"And are you alone?"

"My husband is in lecture. He will be here presently," said Ruth, with a slight blush; for she was but a two months' bride, after all. Then, as Lord Edward still looked dissatisfied, she suddenly recollected that Jasper was not the object of this inquiry. "We expect David and my sister either to-night or to-morrow morning. They have had a prosperous tour, and Isabel writes that David is as strong as he ever was. He has only come back to escort Isabel, before going off to Malta."

"And Miss Lennox will remain with you?"

"Yes." Ruth thought that Lord Edward would have ample opportunity for talking of and to Isabel, in the course of his visit, and she was impatient for English news. "You wrote from Holmdale, Lord Edward?"

"Yes. I went there for a few days after the House was prorogued, and I come here, charged with more expressions of good-will than I can remember, from all your friends. The Doctor was particularly flourishing."

"I hoped so," said Ruth; "he is such an excellent correspondent — gossip for me, and scholarship for Jasper. We can hardly keep up with him."

"And Miss Perrott's rheumatism was less obtrusive than usual," continued Lord Edward, a little dryly, for he was infected by Isabel's wicked inclination to make light of that lady's infirmities.

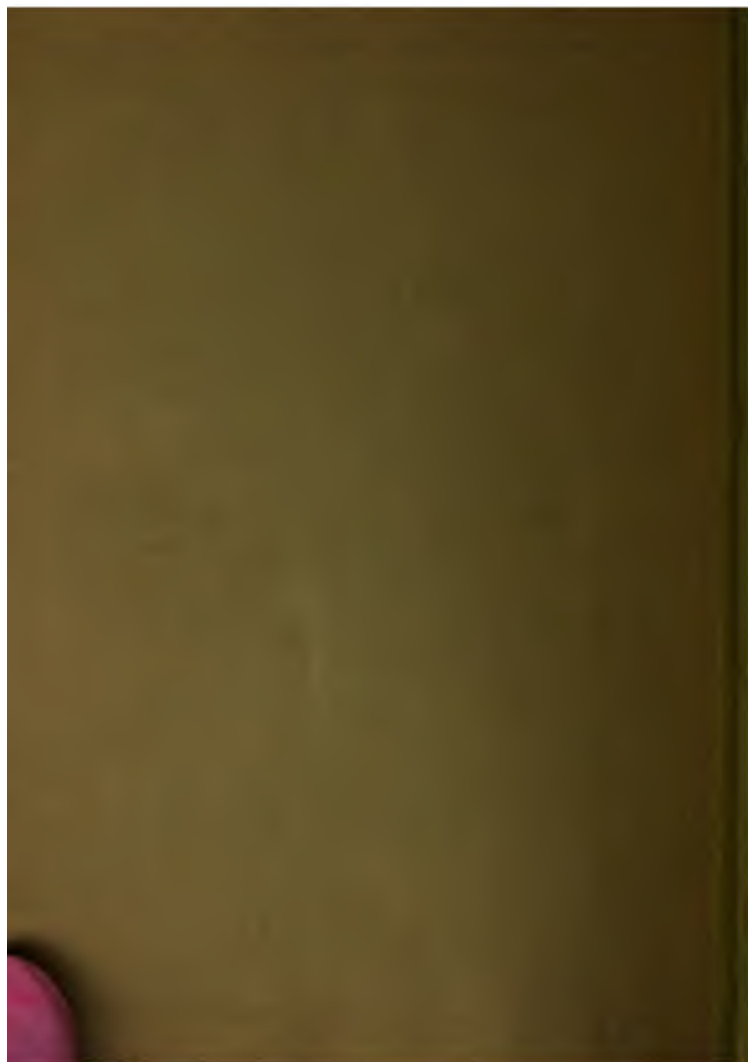
When Ruth's appetite for Holmdale news was satisfied, she only travelled as far as Dyne Court.

"Tell me about the Gascoignes," she said. "I have heard nothing of them since we left, or hardly anything. My only letter from Clara was not satisfactory."

"I am afraid there is nothing satisfactory to tell," said Lord Edward, gravely. "Mrs. Gascoigne is very gay; but it is a gaiety which reminds me of the 'crackling of thorns.' Even when she smiles and talks most, her harassed, careworn expression shows how far she is from true happiness. I seldom see her with her husband, and then his indifference is more

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